

# Early Shī‘ite Mysticism: Imāmology and the “*Ghulāh*” Tradition

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Ph. D

Languages and Cultures of the Near and Middle East

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**Report on the Thesis of Mr S. L. Carney, 'Early Shi'ite Mysticism: Imamology and the "GhulĀh" Tradition', Submitted to the School of Oriental and African Studies for the award of a PhD in Languages and Cultures of the Near and Middle East.**

This is the third time this thesis has been submitted for approval to the external examiners. On this occasion there has been some progress made. The analysis of early Imāmī *ĪadDth* literature is more nuanced than in previous versions, and there is (limited) recognition of the problematic method of adducing simple theological factions from *ĪadDth* reports found in later collections such as those of al-Saffar and al-Kulaynī. The focus of the thesis has narrowed to a comparison of the material within the *ĪadDth* collections and the *ghulĀh* accounts in early *fīraq* literature. The analysis is rather haphazard, with occasional elements of careful textual description mixed in with conclusions unsupported by the textual tradition. There are regular misreadings and mistranslations of the Arabic texts, and a general sloppiness in transliteration and presentation generally.

The choice of the "test case" doctrines (namely *tafwĪĀ*, *ibĀĪa* and *taĪrĪf*) is now better justified, and is portrayed as coming out of an analysis of the principal doctrines of the *ghulĀh* in the *fīraq* literature. This choice though could have been made more explicit and more precisely reasoned. The choice of *ĪadDth* and *tafsDr* material with which to compare the *fīraq* literature could also have been more fully justified. For example, there is a tendency to lift material from al-ĪAyyĀshī, al-Kulaynī and al-NaffĀr with no (or little) attention to the context of the citation within the original work, nor the structure of the work from which the candidate is citing.

The thesis can make a contribution to scholarship in the area providing the following corrections are carried out:

**Formal corrections:**

1. The presentation of the thesis is very poor. The transliteration system used within the thesis is inconsistent, irregular and at times bizarre. For example, the abstract has the dot under the u rather than the h of Muhammad, the *Īayn* and *Īamza* reversed and a rather strange attitude towards capitalisation (why Ar-RĀzī but as-NaffĀr? This occurs throughout the thesis). There are also grammatical errors ("the Imams... who rules" rather than "who rule"). Whilst the stray dot in Muhammad is solved in the main contents of the thesis, other errors abound. The *Īayn/Īamza* confusion continues throughout the thesis and this must be corrected. *ĪAbdallah* (p.6 and throughout) has no macron; *ShĪĪ* is sometimes spelled with two macrons over the i-s and an *Īayn* – sometimes with no macrons and a *Īamza*, sometimes with no macrons and an *Īayn*. When incorporated into the anglicised Shi'ite or Shi'ism, there is no consistent approach over which i should have a macron and which not, nor whether the *Īayn* should be shown or not. There are examples of *ShĪĪ* being made plural (i.e. "Shi'ahs", p.14, p.82) which makes little sense. There appears to be a policy of recording genitive endings (*AbŪ ĪAbdillah* for example, p.7) – but this is not carried through into the other case ending for some reason. There are sometimes numerous different spellings of the same word on a single page (e.g. *Madinahn*, *Madinan*, with macron or without macron, p.12). Letters are inappropriately points (p.13, *taqsDr* with no

pointed s, though *muqaŌŌir* in the same line is correctly points). There is a rather strange attitude towards capitalisation “Incarnation”, “Divine” (p.13) for example are capitalised, though it is unclear why. Proper names are sometimes with the *alif-lām* and sometimes without. When the *alif-lām* is followed by a sun-letter the policy appears to be to capitalise everything (e.g. An-NawbakhtŌ, p. 498 and following). When it is not, the lower case is maintained (al-AshŸarŌ, regularly spelled incorrectly). This (very strange) policy only seems to apply to proper names, but this is inconsistently applied. IsmĀŸŌŌ is sometimes transliterated correctly, but regularly it not – the final i is left with no macron on most occasions (but not, for some reason, all). Spelling throughout is according to American rather than UK English. Stray full stops seem to appear in the text for no reason (e.g. p.5, “ibn.”) as do inexplicable spaces (e.g. p.27 “al- MughŌrah”). HishĀm b. al-ġakam is referred to as HĀshim (p.47). These corrections apply to the first 50 pages – but could be replicated throughout the thesis.

2. There are many incorrect or faulty reading of names, for example: pp. 39-40 SalŌm b. Qays should be Sulaym b. Qays. p. 28 al-ŸAjalŌ should be al-ŸIŸlŌ. p. 47 Minkhal should be al-Munakhkhal. p.57 and throughout al-NawĀfilŌ should be al-NawfalŌ. p. 93 BarŌd should be Burayd. p. 135 al-GhafĀrri should be al-GhifĀrŌ
3. Expression is regularly unclear. For example, p.8 ImĀmŌ is repeated twice in the quotation. p.11 “extremely large *ġadŌth* literature” makes little sense – presumable “an extremely large body of *ġadŌth* literature” is meant; p.16 “his work is a specific attempt” – presumably what is meant here is that Amir-Moezzi’s work is a “concentrated” or “directed” attempt; p.16 again, paragraph two - “this work” it is entirely unclear which work this refers to; p.19, para 1 – the first sentence does not make sense; p.22 “a very esoteric text” does not make sense (can a text be “very” esoteric? This relates to a general slipperiness with the use of this term – see below).
4. The referencing system is strange, though thankfully consistently so. However, there are references within the text which do not appear in the bibliography – and some of these are incorrect. p.25 Helm, should be Halm (I presume), though with no bibliographical detail at the end of the thesis it is difficult to tell. One presumes the reference is to *Die Schia* referenced in the “German” section (p.204), though this is not clear.

To correct these errors – some of which have already been pointed out to the candidate on previous occasions – would be a major, but mechanical task, perfectly within the abilities of a careful scholar.

#### Substantial Corrections

Whilst the hypothesis of the thesis (namely that ImĀmŌ theology during the period of al-KulaynŌ or thereabouts shows similarity with the *GhulĀh*) is one which could be subject to criticism – but most importantly, the candidate needs to marshal his evidence for the conclusions more effectively, and tighten his argument at numerous points. The following selection represent the most urgent changes:

1. p.12, n.26 – reference could be made here to Crone’s argument that the ShŌŸŌ school was Kufan rather than Madinan, and the Madinan attribution is a back projection. (*Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*, p.21-23)
2. p.12 “which many other ImĀmŌ Shiites regarded as “heterodoxy”” – exactly who is referred to here is not clear.
3. p.15 The logic of the move from Antinomianism and the Knowledge of the Imam is not clear – how are these two linked?



4. p.17 – there is a reference to SijistĀnĪ – but no reference to any of his works – or even secondary literature on the subject.
5. the use of the term esoteric throughout the thesis (see e.g. p.50) – but in the first 50 pages in particular – is rather imprecise – at times esoteric seems synonymous with mystical (which it is not), and at other times is used more accurately to refer to secret doctrine.
6. p.25-50 – there are various references in these pages to Ash'YarĪ, ŌabarĪ and others “thinking” or “arguing” this or that position – but with no reference to their works or any other sources – the descriptions may well be accurate, but they do need to be sourced.
7. p.31 there is a tendency to rig the question – that is, to choose the “deification of the Imams” as the most fruitful point of comparison between *ghulĀh* doctrine and Imam *ĪadDth* literature, and therefore ignoring the fact that there is much in each which does not bear any fruitful comparison.
8. p.38 – is it not a mischaracterisation of Amir-Moezzi’s thesis that he considers early ImĀmĪ Shi'Yism as an “esoteric cult”? His view, which can be criticised from many angles, is rather more nuanced than this.
9. The quotation on p.44 from the *Yllal al-SharĀ'ī* is rather sloppy and inaccurate and needs rectifying along the lines indicated previously.
10. In the first 100 pages, the use of al-KhuṭbĪ’s *rijĀl* work as one’s main source is certainly problematic – whether or not al-KhuṭbĪ is citing the original sources accurately. Similarly the citing of modern authors such as AyatallĀh Ma'Yrifah does little to help the argument.
11. p.54-55, the comparison between Modarressi’s interpretation of the *ĪadDth*, and the *ĪadDth* itself may well be worth making – but the *ĪadDth* itself has to be cited, translated and a careful analysis of Modarressi’s interpretation is required.
12. The citation of the reports in chapters 2 and 3 generally is not particularly critical – clearly the candidate thinks them to be accurate depictions of earlier theological views. This may, indeed, be correct, but a methodological passage in which this view is justified and explained is essential - p.66-82 are not sufficient (or particularly clearly argued) in this regard. The argument that early ImĀmĪ scholars cited *isnĀds* as decoration has been proposed by the AkhbĀrĪs previously, but is unlikely to be accurate.
13. The use of the *Nahj al-BalĀgha* (p.85 and elsewhere) requires justification – cf n.291 on that page.
14. p.92 – the reference to Ibn 'ArabĪ is irrelevant to the argument here, and shows a general tendency in the thesis to argue against the tradition, rather than to establish trends within the early ShĪ'Ī school.
15. p.114 – not only is the *ĪadDth* cited here unreferenced, its translation and analysis by Amir-Moezzi, who is being criticised, is also unreferenced.
16. p.136-137 – the long citation from the *BiĀr* – this should be checked and re-translated – it is rather clumsily worded – and even inaccurate in places – as has been previously indicated.
17. Similarly, the quotations on p.160 and 161.
18. p. 163: The statement that many IsmĀ'ĪDĪs and later *ghulĀh* openly accepted the idea that the Qur'Ān had been changed is mistaken. IsmĀ'ĪDĪs do not claim that the Qur'Ān has been changed or tampered with.

These corrections, though many, would have been quite possible within the University of London requirements for minor corrections – that is, three months

according to the University of London Regulations for the Degrees of MPhil and PhD,  
7.3.3 paragraph (b).

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# Abstract

In this research, we explore the early Imāmī Shī'ī Muslim *ḥadīth* literature, the mystical teachings related to Imāmate and Imāmology therein, and their relationship to the religious beliefs held by the Shī'ī “extremist sects” (the *ghulāh*). My argument is that the early Imāmī *ḥadīth* literature’s understanding of Imāmate and Imāmology bears great resemblance to many (not all) of the doctrines held by these “*ghulāh*”. The doctrines of the *ghulāh* developed separately from early Ḥusaynid legitimism; these doctrines did not begin to come together until the time of the Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir. The main texts under discussion are *al-Kāfī* of Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī Ar-Rāzī and the *Baṣā'ir ad-Darajaṭ* of aṣ-Ṣaffar al-Qummī, as these texts best represent the early period of Imāmī Shī'ism, before the Mu'tazilah began to exert a greater influence over Imāmī doctrine and significantly “rationalize” many aspects of Shī'ī doctrine.

The first chapter of the thesis deals with the *ḥadīth* literature itself, listing the texts under discussion and presenting information about their authorship and structure. The second chapter explores the “extremist” sects of early Shī'ism (the *ghulāh*), in order to define the body of beliefs that were and continue to be classified as “extreme”. The third chapter deals with the vast body of Imāmī *ḥadīths* concerning the Divinity or semi-Divinity of the Imāms. The fourth chapter then discusses the specific doctrine of *tafwīḍ*, which posits the Imāms as a kind of demiurge who rules over creation. The fifth chapter deals with “extremist” antinomianism. In the sixth chapter, another doctrine commonly associated with the “extremists” is discussed: the belief that the 'Uthmānic codex of the Qur'ān was

tampered with by the Prophet Muḥammad's companions. In the conclusion, the violent suppression of many of the *ghulāh* in the period subsequent to the Twelfth Imām's Occultation is discussed, as well as a final survey of the findings made in the research.

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# Introduction

## Plan and Methodology of the Research

In this research, we will attempt to explore the Imāmological doctrines that were current during the formative and early period of Shī‘ī Imāmī Islam, beginning with the “ancient” period of the Twelver Shī‘ī Imāms themselves (from the death of the Prophet to the onset of the Twelfth Imām’s “Greater Occultation” in the year 329/941), until the formation of a systematic Shī‘ah orthodoxy during the Buyid period (334/945-447/1055). We will compare the views on Imāmology as represented in a number of early Imāmī Shī‘ite works, and show parallels between these works on Imāmate present in these works with the doctrines usually associated with the “extremist” Shī‘ites, the *ghulāh*. The doctrines include *tafwīd* (the idea of the Imām as a demiurge), metemphosis (the idea that the Imām is fundamentally a “being of Light”, and that this light is passed down in a hereditary lineage), and antinomianism. It is our argument that Ḥusaynid legitimism developed separately from the *ghulāh* and their speculations, and that these two elements did not start to coalesce until the time of Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja‘far aṣ-Ṣādiq. The main person responsible for this, as we will argue, was most likely the Kūfan mystic and esotericist Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Ju‘fī (d. 128 or 132 *hijrī*), who claimed a “secret” set of teachings from Muḥammad al-Bāqir and began to propagate a new Imāmology amongst the Ḥusaynid faction. When theological disputes began to arise in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century *hijrī*, many Imāmī Shī‘ites began to make use of *ghulāh* Imāmological ideas in order to deal with a very different theological issue, the question of how to reconcile religious life with a negative theology. We will show the similarities between the Imāmology of the Qumm school scholars of *ḥadīth*, and discuss the final battles between the *ghulāh* and the mainstream Imāmī community at the onset of the Occultation.

Dealing with the history of Shī‘ism during this period is no easy task. As Buckley observed:

Writing the history of early politico-religious movements is often fraught with difficulties. As regards the early Shiah, not least of these difficulties results from the existence of later more or less consolidated forms of Shiism. The various strands of early Shiite thought underwent a process of reformulation, selection and coalescence and Shiism attained its formal doctrinal aspect. The most important of these forms of Shiism in terms of size, Imanism, began to emerge during the latter part of the ninth/third

century 260/873—4, after the occultation of the twelfth imam Muhammad al-Muntazar. The historian's access to the grey area of uncertainties before that time must be largely acquired through the medium of later Shiite writers who either viewed past events and doctrinal formulations as a precursor to the present situation as they perceived it, or in contradistinction to it. They were not writing for disinterested scholarly motives, but rather to instruct and confirm people in their faith. They had little interest in historically accurate beginnings.<sup>1</sup>

As Hodgson<sup>2</sup> has argued, even the specific concept of a hereditary<sup>3</sup> Imāmah does not seem to have existed before the time of the Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 114/733). In Shī'ī sources that were compiled well after the formal Imāmi doctrine of hereditary Imāmah had been established - like the *Nahj al-Balāgh* of Sayyid Rāḍī (b. 359/970) - there is no mention of the doctrine of hereditary Imāmah ascribed to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. In fact, most Shī'ī *ḥadīth* collections do not ascribe this doctrine to any of the Imāms before Muḥammad al-Bāqir.<sup>4</sup>

Parallel to the development of legitimist ideas of Imāmah was the growth of a heterodoxy that viewed the Imāms as in some way Divine. This has often been traced back to the time of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib himself, with the heresiarch 'Abdallāh ibn Sabā posited as being the sources. 'Abdallāh ibn Sabā, according to the accounts given by An-Nawbakhtī and others, is said to have been a Jew of Yemeni extraction who first began to "manifest hatred of Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthman"<sup>5</sup> and, by others to somehow deify the personality of the Imāms. Hostile Sunnī critics have often argued that he was the forefather of Shi'ism as a whole, and use this as proof that Shi'ism is a religion of "Jewish origin". Shī'ī *ḥadīths* of a much later period seem to acknowledge his existence, though he is always portrayed as a heretic who was punished by 'Alī himself for his deviances.<sup>6</sup> Academic research has been divided on the question of whether or not such a personality ever existed. But regardless of the historical debates concerning the origins of their existence, it is clear from the Imāmī Shī'ite *ḥadīth* and *rijāl* literature, the *firaq* works of both Sunni and Shī'iah commentators, and the early history of

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<sup>1</sup> Buckley 301.

<sup>2</sup> Hodgson 1.

<sup>3</sup> By hereditary, we mean the doctrine that some kind of ontological quality (like inherent infallibility) is inherited from one Imām to another, and that this quality makes the Imām fundamentally different from "normal" human beings. This is something of a whole different order than mere Alid or Hashimite legitimism, something that could be advocated without any belief in infallibility, demiurging powers assigned to the Imāms, or any of the other doctrines we will be dealing with in-depth in this research.

<sup>4</sup> See Lalani 27-55.

<sup>5</sup> An-Nawbakhtī 78.

<sup>6</sup> *Wasa'il* 28:336.

the Ismā'īlī movement<sup>7</sup>, that groups deifying the Imāms were well in existence by the time of the Imām Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq in the eighth century/second century *hijrī*. However, these groups seem to have been largely separate from the proto-Imāmī community that believed the Imāmah continued in the progeny of Ḥusayn. Ḥusaynid legitimacy and quasi-*ghulāh* speculation about the Imāms do not seem to unite until after the death of 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn, when many *ghulāh* in the Ḥanafid movement started to migrate to the Ḥusaynid camp. The famous *ghulāh* Bayān ibn Sam'ān and Mughīrah ibn Sa'd seem to be among the first to begin this transition, but it seems to have been the Kūfan Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Ju'fī (a non-Ḥanafid) who started to unite Kūfan Ḥanafid ideas on Imāmah with Ḥusaynid legitimism.

Once this coalescence begins, we start to find Imāmī authors using quasi-*ghulāh* ideas to deal with the question of how an utterly transcendent God can be known by human beings. Many doctrines that, before the semi-defection of Bayān and Mughīrah to the Ḥusaynid camp seem to have only existed amongst the *ghulāh*, begin to be incorporated into Imāmī thought. We will be comparing doctrines that are associated with the *ghulāh* in heresiographical, *rijāl*, and *ḥadīth* works with the Imamological doctrines advanced by tenth-century Imāmī scholars, primarily of the Qumm school. These include Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn al-Farrūkh aṣ-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, author of *Baṣā'ir ad-Darajāt*, and Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī Ar-Rāzī (d. 328/939), author of *al-Kāfī*. These two texts, along with the *tafsīrs* of 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. 307/919) and Muḥammad ibn Mas'ūd al-'Ayyāshī (d. 320/931) the *Kitāb al-Ghaybah* of Abū 'Abdillāh Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Ja'far An-Nu'mānī (d. 345 or 360/956 or 971), and the doctrinal works of Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq Ibn Bābawayh (d. 381/992), will provide the main bases for comparison. These are the scholars who are primarily associated with the early "Qumm" school,<sup>8</sup> although the scholarly populace of Qumm was often violently opposed to the ideas advocated by these scholars.

We have chosen to deal with the earliest texts of Imāmī *ḥadīth*, because they offer more fruitful grounds for comparison with *ghulāh* ideas than do texts composed during the later Buyid period. The reason for this is simply that greater emphasis is laid upon Imāmology in those early texts than there is in most later works (an exception this would be the work of Ibn Shahrāshūb al-

<sup>7</sup>See Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 64-66.

<sup>8</sup>Here, the school of Qumm should be taken in its broadest sense, referring to a school of thought in Imāmī Shī'ism that placed great emphasis on *ḥadīth*. This is to be counterpoised to the later Baghdad school, which placed a far greater emphasis upon independent reason.

Māzandarāni) written before the Ṣafāvid period. It has been argued by Moojan Momen<sup>9</sup> and Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi<sup>10</sup> that a shift occurred in Imāmī Shī'ism during the Buyid period, where the more "extremist" understandings of Imāmate were largely abandoned in favour of a more rationalized understanding of Shī'ism, an understanding that (according to some scholars) was often heavily influenced by the Mu'tazilah.<sup>11</sup> Momen writes:

The change of doctrine that occurred among the Imāmī [Imāmī] Shī'ah involved an almost complete *volte-face* on most issues...From believing that the Qur'ān has been tampered with and altered so as to exclude evidence of 'Alī's succession [to the Prophet], they came to believe that the present version of the Qur'ān is complete and unaltered. From a belief that God has delegated certain of his functions such as creation to intermediaries such as the Imāms, they came to believe that only God performs these functions.<sup>12</sup>

In particular, Amir-Moezzi in his *Le Guide divin dans le Shī'isme original* provides a statistical analysis of the types of narrations present in the early Imāmī corpus, arguing that some of the more "extreme" narrations in the early Imāmī *ḥadīth* literature (such as *al-Kāfī* and *Baṣā'ir*) were selectively excluded by later scholars (such as Ash-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā).<sup>13</sup> Between early texts, such as *Baṣā'ir* and *al-Kāfī*, one notices a subtle downplaying of the position of the Imāms,<sup>14</sup> a "step-down" from earlier "extremism". Many basic Imāmological ideas can, of course, still be found in these later texts; basic doctrines such as infallibility (*'iṣmah*) were preserved<sup>15</sup>, as well as the belief in the miraculous powers of the Imāms.<sup>16</sup> However, other doctrines which were emphasized in earlier texts, doctrines such as *tafwīḍ* (the belief that the Imāms have a kind of demiurgic role) or *taḥrīf* (distortion of the 'Uthmānic codex of the Qur'an) are largely absent from *ḥadīth* books composed during the Buyid period.

Amir-Moezzi's main thesis is that Shī'ism was almost entirely a "esoteric" school before the Buyid period. Momen's rather general statement concerning the *volte-face* of early Shī'ī belief makes a similar import. An analysis of the works under discussion belies this argument. It certainly seems to

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<sup>9</sup> Momen 77-82.

<sup>10</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 5-14.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Madelung "Imāmīsm" 13-14.

<sup>12</sup> Momen 78.

<sup>13</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 18.

<sup>14</sup> Newman *Formative* 121-123, 136-137.

<sup>15</sup> Madelung "Imāmīsm" 15-16.

<sup>16</sup> Halm "Das Buch der Schatten I" 252.

be the case that some later scholars (like aṣ-Ṣadūq) downplayed the cosmic significance of the Imām, and tended to not include narrations that seemed a bit “extreme”. However, Amir-Moezzi does not seem to acknowledge the existence of much more theologically moderate segments of the Shī‘ī community during the pre-Buyid period. Their existence, their arguments both with the *ghulāh* and with other members of the Imāmī community, can be seen played out across the pages of the *rijāl* texts, and this battle does not seem to begin until the time of the Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir. Momen’s rather terse analysis, and Amir-Moezzi’s rather extended analysis, both seem to be saying that early Shi’ism was primarily a movement of the *ghulāh*, and that it was only with the rise of the Mu’tazilah in Baghdad that Shī‘ite Islam became more “rationalized”. This *volte-face* cannot be justified when one looks at the doctrines and work ascribed to important Imāmi scholars of the second century, such as Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam and Zurārah ibn ‘Ayun, and their very hostile reception to the new influx of post-Ḥanafid *ghulāh*. Nor can it be reconciled with the almost total absence of such reformed *ghulāh* doctrines being attributed to any Imāms before Muḥammad al-Bāqir, nor with the absence of any significant recorded conflict between these moderates and an “esoteric” faction before al-Bāqir’s time.

It is true that, as Buckley has noted, later Shī‘ite writers have been far from unbiased in attempting to understand the crucial formative period of the ninth and tenth century. Attempts are made to re-mould early doctrines in light of later ones, and “had little interest in historically accurate beginnings”.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, one will find a greater overlap between the “mainstream” and the “extremist” wings of early Shi’ism if one looks to the earlier texts. It is for this reason that, in comparing early Imāmī Shī‘ī Imāmology with the theology of the *ghulāh* sects, we will focus on earlier texts such as *al-Kāfī* and *Baṣā’ir ad-Darajāt*, rather than later texts such as *Nahj al-Balāghah*. We will make use of some later texts as they become relevant, including the 17<sup>th</sup>-century *Biḥār al-Anwār*,<sup>18</sup> which contains a series of sermons on Imāmology that are similar to those found in earlier works, and make for useful comparison. However, our focus will be on the Imāmological doctrines found in the *ḥadīth* composed by Qumm-school scholars like al-Kulaynī and aṣ-Ṣaffār al-Qummī.

It should not be mistaken that, because there are doctrines similar to those held by the *ghulāh* in works like *al-Kāfī* or *Baṣā’ir*, it would be fair to label these works as *ghulāh* texts in any way. It is

<sup>17</sup> Buckley 301.

<sup>18</sup> A full treatment of the Imāmological ideas found in *Biḥār* and current during the 17<sup>th</sup>-century can be found in Turner’s *Islām without Allāh?*



true that many modern Shī'ite jurists, as well as some academics, consider many of the Imāmological teachings in these works to be extreme and, by extension, inauthentic. This is an argument advanced by Hossein Modarressi in his *Crisis and Consolidation in Early Shi'ism*. However, similarity does not imply identity. There are two key differences between this work and anything that was associated with the *ghulāh*.

Firstly, while the texts we are dealing with are certainly arguing that the Imām is more than a mortal human being, and has an ontological status separate from others, nowhere is it argued that the Imām is God or an Incarnation of God, a doctrine usually considered the prime shibboleth in defining sects as being *ghulāh*. We will argue that these texts often blur the line between God and Imām, and they seem to have drawn upon *ghulāh* ideas that were alien to the nascent Imāmī community before al-Bāqir. In these texts, the Imām is said to be a demiurge, somehow responsible either for the creation or, at least, the continued existence of the world. His knowledge is posited as being limitless or nearly limitless, as is his power. It is always made clear that, for these authors, the Imām is *not* God; he may be a manifestation of all that is knowable as God, but a line is drawn between the Imām as God's manifestation and between the unknowable Divine Essence itself. *Al-Kāfī* and *Baṣā'ir*, for the most part, operate within a confines of negative theology: God Himself is absolutely unknowable, but what can be revealed of Him, is revealed in the Imām. This is a fine distinction, and the *ḥadīths* that are quoted by these authors do not attempt to explain this in a systematic way.

Secondly, these post-Bāqir Imāmological doctrines are very clearly *exoteric*, intended for the masses at large. They are brought in to deal with a theological problem that was fundamentally rational (the question of how one can know God, and the more specific question of the nature of Divine Attributes), and that theological problem seems to have been of no interest to the *ghulāh*. Al-Kulaynī's own introduction to *al-Kāfī* lays this out in explicit terms:

...You have also said that you want a book which is sufficient [*kāfī*, a derivative of the title of the book] which suffices for all the sciences of the knowledge of religion, and which is sufficient for the student, and which the one seeking guidance may make recourse to, and which anybody can use who desires knowledge of religion and action on the basis of that knowledge,

itself based upon *correct reports* (*āḥād ṣaḥīḥah*) from the two truthful ones [*as-sādiqayn*, the fifth and sixth Imāms] and the well-known practices (*As-sunan al-qā'imah*) which derive from them.<sup>19</sup>

Thirdly, most *ghulāb* sects were either antinomian, or developed their own rituals which were very different from the ritual cult of mainstream Islam. The scholars who composed the *ḥadīth* texts we are dealing with from the pre-Ṣadūq do not seem to have been theologians first and foremost; the works of *rijāl* always attribute far more legal and juristic works to these scholars than anything on theology, let alone mysticism. The vast bulk of *al-Kāfī*, for example, is the *Furū' al-Kāfī*, which is concerned only with matters of ritual law. Any kind of antinomianism is implicitly rejected by the inclusion of such vast amounts of legal material in a work.

### The Sectarian Milieu of the 2nd-4<sup>th</sup> Century *hijrī*

The time in which these texts were composed was a time when a full Imāmī orthodoxy had yet to come into play. Therefore, one will find a wider current of beliefs represented in books such as *al-Kāfī* than, for example, in something like *Nahj al-Balāghah*. In *al-Kāfī*, we can see discussions of the Imām's cosmological role that become important for later mysticism, as well as discussions on rational theology (*kalām*) and juristics. During this period, we witness a historical and doctrinal development that is strikingly different from (and in many, way diametrically opposite) to the way that Sunnī Islam created and entrenched its various orthodoxies. As has been observed by Schacht and others, the growth and development of Sunnī orthodoxy runs parallel to the development of the Sunnī *ḥadīth* literature, so much so that Schacht (and others) view much of the body of *ḥadīth* as being nothing but forgeries, designed to "Islamize" a set of practices common in the Muslim world.<sup>20</sup> As such, the creation of an orthodoxy and the fashioning of a *ḥadīth* literature to support that emerging orthodoxy are seen as going hand in hand.<sup>21</sup> Within the early period of Shī'ism, however, we witness a very different development. We first witness the formation of an extremely large *ḥadīth* literature

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<sup>19</sup> *al-Kāfī* 1:8.

<sup>20</sup> Schacht 214-223. Of course many have rejected this thesis. Cf. Hallaq "Considerations" 679-689, where he attempts to understand the origins of '*uṣūl al-fiqh*' in a much more "religious" context, attempting to "decipher" the meaning of sacred Scripture. Certainly this is the way most Muslim jurists would understand the hermeneutical and interpretive process they embark upon in their works.

<sup>21</sup> As well as the *sīra*, the "biography" of the Prophet. See Peters 298.

attributed to the Prophet and the Twelver Shī'ī Imāms, containing tens of thousands of narrations. The compilation of these narrations seems to have occurred right after the time that the Sunnīs began to formalize their own *ḥadīth* literature. It seems that during this period, a great “competition of orthodoxy” began, and the Shī'ites wanted to “go on record” as to their own interpretation of Islam, as well as provide a body of narrations attributed to their Imāms that would serve as a balance against the emerging Sunnī theological and juridical framework.<sup>22</sup> This was the time of the Sunnī Imām Mālik ibn Anas, who formed one kind of orthodoxy on the basis of Madīnahn practice,<sup>23</sup> and compiled one of the first authoritative Sunnī *ḥadīth* works, *al-Muwattaʿ*.<sup>24</sup> The first dawning of Shī'ite *ḥadīth* compilation seemed to have been a rebellion against the authority of the Madīnahn community. In its place, the supreme position of the Imām was posited as a Shī'ī alternative,<sup>25</sup> and so a systematic attempt to record the Imām's statement on both theology and law began.<sup>26</sup>

During this period, a number of different groups were able to “go on record” in terms of their understanding of Shī'ism and Imāmate, and we see this reflected in the early Imāmī Qummī *ḥadīth* literature. One of the most important doctrines that is found in the early Imāmī *ḥadīth* texts is the belief that the Imāms are somehow Divine in status; that they are more than mere teachers of Law, but are of a very different “substance” than ordinary men. According to this view, the Imām serves a cosmological function, ruling over the heavens and earth, and acting as a “manifestation” of God to His Servants. This doctrine, which many other Imāmī Shī'ites regarded as “heterodoxy”, was often pejoratively referred to as extreme (*ghuluww*). As will be discussed in the second chapter, the term “extremist” is highly ambiguous and resists easy definition.<sup>27</sup> Obviously, what one person may consider an extreme (and therefore deviant) belief might form another person's deeply held faith-based conviction. Extremism (*ghuluww*) does not necessarily refer to political extremism in this context, and it should be observed that the phrase “Shī'ī Extremism” has very different connotations than the phrase “Muslim extremist”. Shi'ite *ghuluww* refers to a kind of theological, rather than overtly political brand of extremism, whereby one is said to make extreme statements about the

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 23-27.

<sup>23</sup> Schacht 61-69.

<sup>24</sup> Coulson *History* 46-47; Dutton 11-16.

<sup>25</sup> Moussavi 19.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 20. It is worth noting that the distinctions between the “Madīnan school” and that of the fifth Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir were not absolutely distinct from each other; the Imām al-Bāqir was himself a resident of Madīnahn, part of its juristic community, and for this reason it is not surprising that Mālik reports *ḥadīth* from al-Bāqir as well. Cf. Jafri 260 and Lalani 96-103.

<sup>27</sup> Hodgson 5.

ontological and theological position of the Prophet, his daughter Fāṭimah, and the Twelve Imāms of his family.<sup>28</sup>

The debate during the crucial period of Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq revolved around the question of to what degree, if any, the Prophet and his family can be classed as "more than human", how far this *supra*-humanity goes, and what the dividing line (if any) there is between the Prophet and his family, and God Himself. The ultimate form of "extremism" was to believe that the Imām was, in some fashion, God Himself, either as an incarnation, or some kind of total "epiphany".<sup>29</sup> Related to this is the idea of *tafwīd*, "delegation", which makes the Imāms into demiurges ruling over their Creation. The beliefs that the Imāms are omniscient and omnipotent are also associated with the *ghulāh*. Other ideas associated with the *ghulāh* are extensions of this basic primacy given to the Imāms, specifically the belief in the corruption of the Qur'ān (*tahrīf*), that the Qur'ān had been tampered with and changed by the Prophet's companions), and antinomianism (*ibāḥah*), the idea that one who "knows" their Imām and believes in him is somehow exempt from the dictates of Islamic law.<sup>30</sup> These two doctrines are extensions of the basic deification of the Imāms that occurs in *ghulāh* theology; the Imām, as God manifest in human form, becomes the sole means for approaching the reality of the Divine.

On the other side of this early debate amongst Imāmīs are those who were accused of "falling-short" with regards to acknowledging the high status (*faḍā'il*) of the Imāms; such people were pejoratively referred to as *muqāṣṣirah* or *muqāṣṣirūn*,<sup>31</sup> and the ultimate type of falling-short (*taqsīr*) was seen to be the belief that the Imāms were merely educated scholars, with no special Divine dispensation or knowledge. This group seems to have been a relative minority during this early period, except in the community of Qumm.<sup>32</sup> What later emerged as an orthodoxy in Imāmī Shī'ism falls somewhere in the middle.<sup>33</sup> The Imāms are not regarded as being in anyway God or an Incarnation of God, yet they are certainly different from ordinary human beings and ordinary scholars: they are

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<sup>28</sup> al-'Asharī 5.

<sup>29</sup> The differences between these two concepts are quite grave, but are outside of the scope of this research. The first assumes a total "descent" of the Divine into physical form, whereas the second assumes a still un-knowable aspect of the Divine. Cf. Corbin *Alone* 84-85.

<sup>30</sup> Hodgson 7.

<sup>31</sup> Modarressi *Crisis* 36.

<sup>32</sup> Kohlberg "Imām and Community" 39; Qumm was the centre of the *muqāṣṣirah* faction during the early period. Even moderate scholars like al-Mufid would denounce the Qummi scholars as *muqāṣṣirah*, cf. Bayhom-Daou *Imāmī* 25-26, 34-36, 156.

<sup>33</sup> Modarressi *Crisis* 48-49.

infallible, sinless beings and (for many),<sup>34</sup> beings made of Light who transcend the limitations of physical reality. There is still a great deal of acrimonious debate amongst Imāmī Shī'ahs about these particular doctrines,<sup>35</sup> especially on the Indian sub-continent.<sup>36</sup> Exploring the intricacies of the contemporary debates are outside the scope of this research. Here, we will only be able to focus on the Shī'ah *ḥadīth* literature, and the theological-Imāmological ideas therein.

In the first chapter, we will discuss the historical backdrop of early Shī'ism. First, we will discuss the theological doctrines of the *ghulāh*, as well as the battle that raged amongst the early Imāmī community concerning the deification of the Imāms. In the second chapter, we will discuss the Qummī *ḥadīth* literature. In chapter three, we will then translate and present the large number of narrations where "extremist" ideas are explicitly asserted. In preparation for this we will also deal with the theological bases for the deification or semi-deification of the Imāms: as will be argued, the idea that God is somehow manifest in the human form of the Imām is inseparable from a basically "agnostic" theology where the transcendence of God is posited to unprecedented heights.<sup>37</sup> In the Qummī *ḥadīth* literature, God is neither perceptible through the physical senses<sup>38</sup> nor through the intellect; transcending every limitation, perception, and conception, the question is raised as to how anybody knows God at all. The answer of the early *ḥadīth* literature seems to be that God makes Himself known and manifest through the figure of the Imām.<sup>39</sup> Amir-Moezzi describes him as the being through which God "touches" humanity,<sup>40</sup> insofar as the Imām provides a kind of bridge between the Absolute and this world. It will be argued that the *ghulāh* ideal of the Imām as a manifestation of the Divine was used by Qummī theologians and jurists as a way of reconciling their negative theology with the need for believers to have some kind of relationship with the Divine. In the fourth chapter, we will deal specifically with the idea of *tafwīḍ* that in some way, the Imāms are the creators of the universe,<sup>41</sup> and they are fully charged with overseeing and ruling the cosmos. In the

<sup>34</sup> *Ṣubḥānī Doctrines* 110-112.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Modarressi *Crisis* 50-51.

<sup>36</sup> See the vicious attack of Naqavi on the Shaykhī sect 136-149. The controversy around Ayatullah Fadlullah in Lebanon is perhaps the most important of these recent debates; Also cf. Brunner 178-187, Rosiny 207-219 and Aziz 205-216.

<sup>37</sup> Amir-Moezzi "Aspects de l'Imāmologie I" 199.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Ṣubḥānī Doctrines* 42.

<sup>39</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 45.

<sup>40</sup> Amir-Moezzi "Aspects de l'Imāmologie I" Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Referred to in many narrations, but adamantly rejected by contemporary Shī'ī orthodoxy. Cf. Modarressi *Crisis* 21, 23, 25, 35, 36. *Ṣubḥānī* Ibid. 22-24. Nonetheless, some jurists (like al-Khumaynī) were able to accept these ideas, so long as they were re-cast in the more formal



fifth chapter, we will build upon this theme to explore antinomian tendencies within the *ḥadīth* literature. Antinomianism is one of the premier beliefs associated with Shī'ī "extremist" sects. Knowledge of the Imām is given supreme soteriological importance, and so these groups seem to set aside the importance of ritual adherence to the institution of Islamic law. There is nothing in the literature that we will discuss that makes such a bold assertion, unlike *tahrīf*, but there is a certain tendency in this direction that, unsurprisingly, was taken up by more "heterodox" Shī'ī sects. The fact that there is little in the way of explicit antinomian narrations indicates that out-and-out antinomianism was a minority position in the early community. In chapter six, we will discuss the Imāmological interpretations of the Qur'an as it exists inside the Qummī and Buyid-era Imāmī literature.

### Review of the Secondary Literature

There has been precious little research into the "spiritual" doctrines of early Shī'ism, and the degree to which the theological speculations of early *ghulāh* were inspired by the actual teachings of the Imāms. The main textbook for Shī'ism is Moojan Momen's *An Introduction to Shī'ī Islam*, this work, however, is a broad survey of the entire history of Imāmī Shī'ism, and so could not deal extensively with the early and formative period of Shī'ism. There has been some admirable scholarship on Shī'ī mysticism, especially the works of Henry Corbin; but most of his works deal with later Shī'ī intellectuals and philosophers, who did not emerge until centuries after the onset of the Twelfth Imām's Occultation, and tend to be written in the vocabulary and language of Sunnī Sufism with only occasional references to the early Imāmī Shī'ī *ḥadīth* literature. These works, of course, have also been criticized for their phenomenological and allegedly "unhistorical" approach. The works that deal with the early period of Shī'ism are more often about early juristic and legal formulations, such as Sachedina's *The Just Ruler in Shī'ī Islam* and Moussavi's *Religious Authority in Shī'ī Islam*. Though these works do deal with the *ḥadīth* literature, they only deal with the legal and doctrinal aspects of that literature. There is also Angelo Arioli's excellent 1979 Italian article on the Shī'ī *rijāl* literature, "Introduzione Allo Studio Del 'Ilm Ar-Rijal/Imāmīta: Le Fonti".

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terminologies of Sunnī Sufism and sufficiently distanced from primitive Shī'ism. See Modarressi Ibid. 49.

First, we can look at the work of Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi. One of the only works that does deal with these issues is Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi's *Le Guide divin dans le Shī'isme original* (English translation: *The Divine Guide in Early Shī'ism*). His work is a specific attempt to unearth what the Imāms "actually" said. The work is extremely erudite, and covers an enormous amount of ground. It is perhaps the best reference for the more mystical aspects of the early Shī'ah *ḥadīth* literature, and is extremely well annotated (the footnotes are nearly as long as the text itself). A large number of *ḥadīths* concerning Imāmology are also translated for the first time into a Western language (the book was originally published in French, and has been translated into English). The book seems to mainly revolve around presenting a massive slew of evidence, and the sheer volume of narrations that he presents is the most compelling part of the book. Amir-Moezzi's research was generally intended to be a synopsis of all the Imāmological themes present within the *ḥadīth* literature, and so most topics are dealt with very briefly. An exception to this would be the subject of *taḥrīf* in the Qur'ān, which (though short) is one of the most extensive academic discussions on this subject (alongside that of Kohlberg and Eliash). The subject of antinomianism is also not dealt with in his work, and the relationship between these narrations and the "extremist" sects of Shī'ism is not formally developed (though the relationship between such ideas and later Sufi formulations is amply discussed). He has also written another very important article, in French and not yet translated to our knowledge, entitled "Aspects de l'Imāmologie doudécimaine I: remarques sur la divinité de l'Imām" ("Aspects of Imāmī Imāmology: Remarks on the Divinity of the Imām"). This was the first in an excellent series of articles on early Imāmī Shī'ī Imāmology. Bar-Asher has also explored the issue of *taḥrīf* in his "Deux traditions heterodoxes dans les anciens commentaries Imāmītes du Coran", though (as the title suggests) he only deals with two somewhat "odd" narrations that throw some questions on the idea of infallibility.

The primary problem with this work, as we have discussed, is that there is an overt attempt to paint the *ghulāh* as "secret followers" of the Imāms. This is argued explicitly in his study of the *riḡāl* literature at the end of *Le Guide divin*, but this is a very tough argument to make. His main evidence is the way that the *ghulāh* seem to be excommunicated from one Imām's entourage, only to show up later on as a member of the next Imām's entourage:

It is interesting to note that, in a number of cases, an “extremist” disciple condemned by an imam is listed among the disciples of the following imam or imams, thus showing that, despite “public condemnation,” he continued to follow the teaching of the imams.<sup>42</sup>

The thunderous condemnations of the Imāms directed against the *ghulāh* are then dismissed as a kind of esoteric dissimulation. The problem with this is that it misunderstands the way that most Imāmī *rijāl* books are structured. Most such texts list narrators in terms of which Imāms they reported from; those who reported from ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib would be first, then those (few) who reported from Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī second, and so forth. However, including them in the list does not in anyway imply that they were part of that Imām’s “entourage”, otherwise the Sunnī Imām Mālīk ibn Anās (who reports from Muḥammad al-Bāqir in some of his works) would also have to be considered a member of their entourage. The way these groups are dealt with in *fīraq* works, like that of An-Nawbakhtī, would seem to indicate that they were definitely on the far margins of the Imāmī community, and were usually not considered part of that community at all (either by the Imāms or the Imāms’ followers themselves).

A second problem with this work is his use of the concept of esotericism. Other than the argument that the Imāms ritually cursed their own “initiated” followers as a way of preserving an esoteric secret, no evidence whatsoever is drawn forth that there was any initiatory rite or practice amongst Imāmīs at this time. The nature of the texts that he is using actually refutes his claim. If the doctrine of the Imām as a demiurge, or as omnipotent in the created world, and so forth, were actually *esoteric* teachings, then they certainly would not have been included in a work like *al-Kāfī* where the author is explicitly targeting the masses as a whole, and seeking to end their confusion. There is no evidence that there was any kind of esotericism within the early Imāmī movement, unless one makes the mistake (as Amir-Moezzi seems to) of confusing “esotericism” with “mysticism”. On the other hand, there very clearly was an esoteric movement in Shī’ism at the time these works were being written, which was the Ismā’īlī movement. The works of the *Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā*, and even the more advanced works of the Ismā’īlī *dā’ir* and philosopher Abū Ya’qūb As-Sijistānī, were already in circulation by the time many of the Imāmī works we are dealing with were composed. If there was an

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<sup>42</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 130.

early esotericism in Shī'ī Islam, it seems very clear that it had sided with Ismā'īl ibn Ja'far's supporters in the succession to Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq.

It is also worth noting that there is, in reality, very little doctrinal similarity between the writings of Ismā'īlī esotericists (esotericists insofar as there does seem to have been a rule of secrecy imposed upon new members, as evidenced from works of the pre-Fāṭimid and early Fāṭimid period like *Kitāb al-'Alīm wa al-Ghulām* of Ja'far ibn Maṣṣūr) and what is presented by Imāmī scholars like al-Kulaynī and al-Qummī. In many ways, the Seveners (i.e., pre-Fāṭimid) and Fāṭimid Ismā'īlī works assign a much lower role to the Imām than what is described in *al-Kāfi*. There is little discussion of metemphosis, and the Imāms are certainly not argued to have vast or infinite knowledge. The *ḥadīth* works of the seminal Fāṭimid jurist al-Qāḍī An-Nu'mān do not in any way attempt to present the Imāms, especially the Fāṭimid Imāms, as supernatural; the closest that one can find is An-Nu'mān's statement about seeing "the light of Imāmah" on the face of the Imām al-Mu'izz when he first came to Cairo.<sup>43</sup> The esotericist tradition in Shī'ī Islam, as exemplified in Ismā'īlī works, views the Imām as the earthly manifestation of a hypostatic entity (the Universal Intellect, the Divine Command, the Universal Soul, depending on the system). The Imām's role is far more conceptual and philosophical, and there is far less of the cult of personality than is given in Qumm school Imāmī *ḥadīth* works. Similarly, there is nothing of the Neo-Platonism or Neo-Pythagoreanism of early Ismā'īlī esotericism in Qummī works, nor does one find Ismā'īlī esotericists quoting any *ḥadīths* similar to the Qummī works until the Nizārī period, and even then, only sparsely in works like Ṭūsī's *Rawḍa-yi Taslīm*.<sup>44</sup> There are some superficial similarities between the Imāmology espoused by Ja'far ibn Maṣṣūr in his *Kitāb al-Kashf*,<sup>45</sup> but nowhere does he mention any of the Imāmological narrations used by al-Kulaynī or al-Qummī. In fact, we see a very explicit condemnation of many "esoteric" ideas concerning Imāmology on the part of Imām al-Mu'izz, such as his rejection of the doctrine of the Imāms having "seven names" that correspond to the seven ontological stations of his being.<sup>46</sup> In short, Qummī Shi'ism and esoteric Shī'ism seem to be widely different movements, with fairly different sources, with little in common except 'Alid legitimism and a belief in infallibility on the part of the Imām.

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<sup>43</sup> An-Nu'mān 47.

<sup>44</sup> Ṭūsī, Naṣīr ad-Dīn 156.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, the discussion Ja'far has concerning 'Alī and Jesus on p. 27 of *Kitāb al-Kashf*, which is one of the few appearances of the "I am..." genre of *ḥadīths* in an Ismā'īlī work.

<sup>46</sup> An-Nu'mān 375.

There is no evidence of these traditions intersecting in any significant way until the time of Naṣīr ad-Dīn Ṭūsī.

Moving from the work of Amir-Moezzi, we can discuss the more “mainstream” work of scholars like S.H.M. Jafri’s *Origins and Early Development of Shī’ah Islam* devotes only a few pages to the “extremists”, and their narrations are explicitly dismissed as forgeries.<sup>47</sup> No evidence is provided for this dismissal. The author states that they are few in number and that they pale in comparison to the number of narrations where the Imāms disavow any type of supernatural or miraculous powers. This assessment is simply not true. As will be seen, the number of narrations where a supernatural Imāmology is posited is vast; and Jafri does not give any reference for the narrations where the Imāms are said to deny such powers. In our own research we have found almost none. His statements on the matter generally remain unsupported in his research. The use of *ḥadīths* is extremely selective and is entirely apologetic; it seems to be geared towards defending Shī’ism against accusations of extremism leveled by Sunnī polemicists. The apologetic nature of the text seems to downplay the existence of both the *ghulāh*, as well as the existence of ideas that were in anyway similar to those of the *ghulāh* by mainstream Qumm scholars. The similarities between the two are avoided in order to portray al-Kulaynī and al-Qummi as presenting identical teachings to aṣ-Ṣadūq, something that is clearly not the case.

The same is also true of Modarressi’s *Crisis and Consolidation in Early Shi’ism*, which deals with a slightly later period than Jafri. Much of the work deals with the conflict between “extremists” and the group he dubs as moderates. It seems very clear that this work has very specific theological and ideological objectives in “refuting” this body of literature and establishing a “moderate” theology. An extensive discussion of the early *ḥadīth* literature is offered in the first parts, and the conflict between the *ghulāh*, the scholars of *ḥadīth*, and the rationalists is offered.

Lalani’s *Early Shī’ī Thought: The Teachings of Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir* also deals with this same period, and is excellent in terms of its chosen subject matter, but the “extremist” current is only dealt with in a few pages. The vast amount of “extremist” narrations attributed to Imām al-Bāqir in both Imāmī, Ismā’īlī, and *ghulāh* traditions are passed over in near silence, in favour of a presentation of his more moderate views. The text also seems to have an apologetic tone similar to that of Jafri, and seems intent on imposing one interpretation of Shī’ism (the “moderate” view of

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<sup>47</sup> Jafri 300-303.



Shī'ism and Imamology) on the history and ignoring a huge amount of textual sources to the contrary. Again, while we agree that the *ghulāh* were clearly held at arms length by most of the early Imāmī community, quasi-*ghulāh* doctrines can be found amongst mainstream scholars as well.

Turning to research about the *ghulāh* themselves, we see that much of it is derived from the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Nuṣayrī apostate Sulayman al-Adhānī's *al-Bakūra As-Sulaymāniyyah fī Kashf Asrār ad-Diyānah An-Nuṣayriyyah al-'Alawīyyah*, an insider's "exposé" of Nuṣayrī rites, which was partially translated into English by Edward Salisbury in 1864. The work suffers from a number of famous defects, the least of which is the "convert zeal" expressed by al-Adhānī, who obviously held his former co-religionists in deep-contempt. Because of the polemical and sectarian bias of the author, all the information in it must be verified by comparing it to other sources.

Strothmann has provided extremely important source material for the Nuṣayrī doctrines and belief system, including his translation of the of the *Risālah* of the Nuṣayrī Shaykh Mahmūd bī 'Umrihī ibn al-Ḥusayn An-Nuṣayrī. His other explorations of Ismā'īlī history and doctrine, such as his *Recht der Ismailiten*, have played an important role in expanding Western academic knowledge of Shī'ī esotericism in all of its forms.

Ronald Buckley's "The Early Shiite Ghulāh" is an excellent introduction to the beliefs and doctrines of the early *ghulāh*, as well as the ways in which they have been dealt with in the heresiographical literature. He makes important observations about the difficulties faced when attempting to describe a religious sect by means of an extremely hostile set of opponents. He rightly points out that the heresiographical literature was never intended to be "historical" documents, providing an "objective" view on the development of various sects. Rather, they seek to refute a set of doctrines and affirm that one particular group of people (namely the sect followed by the author) is the "saved sect," and that all others are in hell. His approach to the heresiographical literature is balanced, and his text is both informative with regards to understanding the *ghulāh* themselves, as well as understanding how Sunnī and Imāmī scholars reacted to their beliefs.

Andrew J. Newman's *The Formative Period of Twelver Shī'ism* is an excellent study on the *ḥadīth* texts we are exploring here. Newman looks at the traditionalist school of Qumm, as exemplified by scholars such as al-Barqī, aṣ-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, and al-Kulaynī and the way these authors responded to the rationalism which was growing in Baghdād at the time. An extensive discussion is offered of the theological, Imāmological, and jurisprudential doctrines present in these

texts. However, very little is said about the *ghulāh*. The “arational” approach of Qumm-based traditionalists such as al-Kulaynī is not explicitly linked to the “gnostic”, anti-rationalist beliefs that are common to nearly all of the *ghulāh* sects. The social and political circumstances of Qumm, an isolated Shī’ī enclave in an otherwise Sunnī country, is cast as a backdrop on the ideological debates prevalent at the time. The traditionalism of al-Kulaynī and al-Qummī is seen to result, in part, from this sense of isolation. However, while the external state of conflict is presented in depth, the internal conflicts which faced Qumm at the time are not discussed in great detail. Al-Kulaynī and al-Qummī are taken as fully representative of the theological traditions current in Qumm at the time. However, a study of the early Imāmī *rijāl* literature indicates that Qumm was at many points dominated by the *muqaṣṣirah*, who would go so far as to try and murder scholars who passed on narrations of a *bāṭinī* nature. The *rijāl* literature often paints Qumm as a depressingly oppressive place, where scholars who held to the kind of mysticism advocated by *al-Kāfī* and *Baṣā’ir* were subject to intimidation, exile, and violence. Newman’s article on the development of the occultation doctrine, “Between Qumm and the West,” is an important and valuable contribution to the relationship between the text of al-Kulaynī and An-Nu’mānī’s *Kitāb al-Ghaybah*.

Another text which deals with the distinctions between Baghdādī rationalism and Qummī traditionalism is Sander’s *Zwischen Charisma und Ratio*. The importance of two competing visions of Imāmate, one which focuses upon the luminous personage of the Imām, and the author in his role as explicator of the Divine Law, is discussed. The works of *ḥadīth* scholars like al-Barqī and al-Kulaynī are contrasted to the rationalist theology of scholars like Shaykh al-Mufīd, who would be destined to take the Imāmī Shī’ī community in a very different direction than that desired by earlier *muḥaddithūn*. It also contains one of the best synopses on the theo-Imāmological doctrines of al-Barqī in particular, who has been little studied in the West.

Heinz Halm’s studies on the Gnosticism of the early *ghulāh*, such as his two part article *Das Buch der Schatten*, and *Die islamische Gnosis: Die extreme Schia und die Alawiten*, are an invaluable source of information about the beliefs and doctrines found in such esoteric texts as the *Kitāb al-Haft*. He discusses, in a great deal of depth, the intricate nature of “primitive” *ghulāh* Shī’ism, which has proven invaluable in attempting to compare specifically *ghulāh* ideas on theology and Imāmology with those found in leading Imāmī *ḥadīth* books such as *al-Kāfī*. His *Die Schia* (translated into English as *Shī’ism*) also provides a valuable history of all the significant movements within Shī’ism,

including the “mainstream” Imāmī as they have developed up until the modern period, as well as on the early *ghulāh*, and specifically Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, one of the great heresiarchs of early Shī’ism. It is interesting to note, in light of Amir-Moezzi’s thesis, the degree to which the themes present in a very esoteric text like the *Kitāb al-Haft* (such as the gnostic doctrine of the creation of the shadows) does not seem to play any role in the Qummī school of thought, though some reflections of it could be seen in much later Ismā’īlī works of the Musta’lī tradition.

One excellent study on this subject is Bayham-Daou’s “The Second-Century Shī’ī Ghulat: Were they Really Gnostic?”, which is a response to Heinz Halm’s thesis that much of primitive Shi’ism was Gnostic in origin. Her doctoral thesis on early Imāmī Shī’ī thinking is also outstanding. Her works mainly approach the subject through the heresiographical literature, without a detailed exploration of the specific themes in the *ḥadīth* literature itself. The most important work in this regard would be Moosa’s *Extremist Shī’ites*, which presents an exhaustive discussion of sects like the Ahl-i Ḥaqq and the ‘Alawīs/Nuṣayrīs. This work does deal, in some detail, with the *ḥadīth* literature, but it is primarily a discussion of *later* “extremist” sects, rather than focusing on the early *ghulāh* that we will deal with here. There is also a tendency to rely uncritically on what is obviously hostile heresiographical literature, a mistake that scholars of lesser-known religions often make. However, the book is also rife with frequent ideological statements about the degree to which “extremist” Shī’ite views deviate from “true Islām”.

Another doctoral thesis, *The Waning of the Qizilbash: The Spiritual and the Temporal in Seventeenth Century Iran* by Kathryn Babayan, deals with the Qizilbash tribes who were used by the Turkic Ṣafawid dynasty during their conquest of Iran. The text deals with a time that is much later than anything we are dealing with here in this research, but her introduction provides a useful sketch of some of the *ghulāh* doctrines. Divinity of the Prophet or Imāms is emphasized, and these doctrines are traced back to pre-Islamic sources. A close connection between extremist theological ideas and Messianism (a connection that would be important for the rise of the Ṣafawids) is drawn. In particular, the link between *ghulāh* political radicalism and the political aspirations of displaced Persians is also discussed; some of the *ghulāh* sects are viewed as being specifically anti-Arab movements, a view that was also taken by many Sunni heresiographers.

The Nuṣayrīs are also discussed with some detail in Javad Ali’s 1926 “Die beiden ersten Safire des Zwölften Imāms”. Dussaud’s *Histoire et Religion Des Nosairis*, however, bases much of his

research on Nuṣayrī sources themselves. It suffers from a number of well-known errors, including the mistaken argument that the Nuṣayris are, in fact, a subset of the Ismāʿīliyyah. Bar-Asher and Kofsky have also written a superb study on the Nuṣayrīs, *The Nuṣayrī-Alawī Religion*, with very important references to Nuṣayrī texts. It is in those texts that many of the narrations appearing in the “orthodox” Shīʿah literature are repeated, with some variation.<sup>48</sup> However, it does not deal with the *ḥadīth* literature at all, except as they appear (often in variant forms) within Nuṣayrī theological literature. Tucker has written two excellent articles about early two of the most famous Shīʿī extremists, Bayān and al-Mughīrah. In Arabic, Wadād al-Qāḍī has written an exhaustive study of one of the earliest extremist sects, the Kaysāniyyah. None of these texts have, however, attempted to relate the specific theological and Imāmological doctrines present in works such as *al-Kāfī* with that of the *ghulāh* sects.

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<sup>48</sup> Amir-Moezzi “Aspects de l’Imāmologie I” 207.

## The Ghulāh

### The Theology of the Ghulāh

The most fundamental kind of *ghuluww* is the belief that the Imāms are God in one form or another. The use of the term *ghulāh* in the sense of “theological extremism” most likely has Qur’ānic origins, particularly verse 4:171: “O people of the book, do not be extreme in your religion”. Momen and Buckley both argue that the reason why certain religious sects were labeled “extreme” was because of their attribution of Divinity to beings other than God.<sup>49</sup> Daftary describes the *ghulāh* as those who attributed miraculous and superhuman powers to the Imāms, though he argues that the specific belief that ‘Alī (or any of the other Imāms) constitutes an Incarnation of God is only of secondary importance, with many so-called *ghulāh* hesitating to attribute even prophecy (much less Divinity) to the Imāms.<sup>50</sup> We do find that a number of other doctrines are also considered hallmarks of *ghulāh* Shī‘ism. Besides asserting the actual Divinity of the Imāms, Momen cites several other beliefs that he considers important to the *ghulāh*: the transmigration of souls (usually referred to as *tanāsukh*), the doctrine of the Occultation (which would, of course, become critically important for orthodox Imāmī Shī‘ism),<sup>51</sup> infallible Imāmah, *tashbīh* (anthropomorphism of God), *tafwīd* (meaning that God has “emanated” or “delegated” His Power to beings other than Him), and *badā’* (the belief that God “changes His Mind”). A similar list is also mentioned by Bayhom-Daou.<sup>52</sup> It is interesting to note that doctrines that were once considered the purview of “extremist Shī‘ites” are now widely accepted by Imāmī Shī‘ah orthodoxy, though many Muslims in Shī‘ism’s formative period would have considered these ideas highly heterodox.<sup>53</sup> This is especially true with regard to the doctrine of *ghaybah*, which as Kohlberg argues was an important belief of early *ghulāh* sects and had become one of their main themes.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Momen 67, Buckley 306.

<sup>50</sup> Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs*, 64-66.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Kohlberg “Belief” 16.

<sup>52</sup> Bayhom-Daou “Ghulāh” 17.

<sup>53</sup> Momen *Ibid*.

<sup>54</sup> Kohlberg “From Imāmīyyah” 531.

Momen, like a number of writers on the *ghulāh* and the various ‘Alawī and Nuṣayrī sects, has argued that the deification of the Imāms was the result of external religious influence.<sup>55</sup> He argues that early Islam was an underdeveloped religious system, and that the teachings of the Prophet were unable to answer basic theological, ontological, and epistemological questions. Because of this, it naturally began to absorb the religious teachings of the people they found in their newly conquered territories: Zoroastrianism, Mazdaism, Manicheanism, and the various sects of the “peoples of the Book” (Jews, Christians, and Sabians). There can be no doubt that the *ghulāh* deification of the Imāms bears striking similarities to Christianity and certain types of pre-Islamic Persian mysticism,<sup>56</sup> but firmer evidence would be needed to establish and corroborate this assertion.

Helm argues that these doctrines first seemed to have made their appearance in Kūfah, which is where ‘Abdallāh ibn Sabā’ is said to have begun his “movement”.<sup>57</sup> Regardless of whether or not ‘Abdallāh ibn Sabā’ actually existed or not, Kūfah was certainly the main centre of the *ghulāh* by the times of the Imāms Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja’far aṣ-Ṣādiq, and Kūfah was where Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, the next most important *ghālī* heresiarch after ibn Sabā’ himself, was killed by ‘Abbasid soldiers between 750 and 755.<sup>58</sup> It has become generally accepted that the revolt of the Ḥanafid al-Mukhtār in 685 provided the incubus for subsequent *ghulāh* speculation, as his movement morphed into the radical Kaysaniyyah. It was during this time, and the subsequent revolt of the Kaysāniyyah, that many ideas associated with the *ghulāh* (and, later, to Imāmī Shī’ites as a whole) start to come into sharp relief: the belief in *rajā’*, the return of messianic and other religious figures; *badā’*, “change in Divine decree,” Occultation (*ghaybah*) of the Imām, and, perhaps most importantly, the idea of an esoteric knowledge, a knowledge that An-Nawbakhtī claims argues al-Mukhtār claimed for himself.<sup>59</sup> If specific extremist beliefs about Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah did not emerge until after al-Mukhtār’s death, this claim (a claim confirmed by al-‘Asharī) is sufficient in identifying him as one of the earliest *ghulāh*.

Our primary source information about the early *ghulāh* are the *firaq* works of various heresiographers, and the historical works of various classical scholars. Probably the best definition, that encapsulates all the various facets of the early *ghulāh*, is that given by Ibn Khaldūn in his *Tārīkh*:

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 65.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Corbin’s *Man of Light in Iranian Sufism* 13-33.

<sup>57</sup> Helm *Shi’ism* 155.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> An-Nawbakhtī 20.

Amongst them [the Shī'ah] are those who are known as extremists [*ghulāb*], who exceed the limits of reason and faith in their belief that these Imāms are divine. Sometimes they say that the Imāms are human beings that are nonetheless described with the attributes of divinity, or that God has become essentially incarnate in a man. These incarnationists conform to the belief of Christians concerning Jesus. Aḥī - may God be pleased with him - burnt whoever believed this lie, and Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah became enraged at al-Mukhtār when he heard of such things, cursing him and disassociating from him. Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq - may God be pleased with him - also did this whenever it came to him that people were saying such things. Amongst the extremists, there are those who say that the perfection of the Imām is not given to anybody other than him, and when he dies, his spirit transfers to another person, in order that this perfection may go to the next Imam. This is the belief in transmigration (*tanāsūḥ*). There are those from the extremists who cease with one particular Imām, and say that Imāmah does not continue after him. These are the *wāqifiyyah*. Some of them say that the Imām is living, and has not died, but is only hidden from the eyes of people; they use the story of Khidr as evidence for this, and say something similar about 'Aḥī. They say that he is in the clouds, and that the thunder is his voice, and that the lightning is in his voice. Others say similar things about Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah, saying that he is in Mount Raḍwā in the Hijāz.<sup>60</sup>

This definition summarizes earlier Sunnī heresiographical work. The most famous heresiographical work is the *Maqālāt al-Islamiyyīn* of the Sunnī theologian and heresiographer Abū al-Ḥasan al-'Ashaṛī (324/935), and that is the main text we will be using. Next is the much better organized work of 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 430/1038). Al-'Ashaṛī's work is contemporary to many of the Qumm scholars we are dealing with, and so we will be focusing on his work first and foremost. On the Shī'ite side, there is the famous *Firāq Ash-Shī'ah* of Ḥasan ibn Mūsā An-Nawbakhtī (d. 310/922), which accords with al-'Ashaṛī's of the *ghulāb* surprisingly well.

As one would expect, al-'Ashaṛī's *Maqālāt* describes the *ghulāb* as those "who go to extremes with regard to 'Aḥī, and say about him fantastic things (*qawl 'aẓīm*)".<sup>61</sup> This language is, of course, fundamentally ambiguous, and could be applied to any Shī'ah sect, even one as moderate as the Zaydis. Fortunately, al-Ashaṛī then goes on to list fifteen so-called sects of the *ghulāb*, assigning various subsets of the doctrines listed by Ibn Khaldūn to specific sects, which he names after their founders. These groups include:

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<sup>60</sup> Ibn Khaldūn 1:198.

<sup>61</sup> al-'Ashaṛī 5.

1) The sect of Bayān ibn Sama'ān. Ostensibly, this group believed in the Imāmah of 'Alī's son, Muḥammad ibn al-al-Ḥanafīyyah, to whom Bayān ibn Sama'ān was seen as the successor.<sup>62</sup> Muḥammad ibn al-al-Ḥanafīyyah is of great importance within the *ghulāh* setting; he seems to be one of the first people for whom Mahdīhood was claimed.<sup>63</sup> The main belief cited by al-'Asharī is anthropomorphism with regards to God. God is seen to exist in a human form, and this form will be annihilated one day. Bayān is also said to have "called upon Venus", to which Venus responded, and he was able to do this through his possession of the "Greatest Name of God". As such, he was often accused of being a magician. This accusation was more famously leveled against al- Mughīrah ibn Sa'd, as will be discussed below.<sup>64</sup> He and al- Mughīrah were both killed by the governor of Kūfah, Khālīd ibn 'Abdillāh al-Qāṣrī, after an aborted uprising in the year 737.<sup>65</sup>

2) The sect of 'Abdallāh ibn Mu'awiyah ibn Ja'far Dhī al-Janaḥayn. 'Abdallāh is alleged to have claimed that knowledge was "fixed" inside his heart. He is also said to have believed in the transmigration of souls, which has been cited as one of the main *ghuluww* beliefs by Momen. Furthermore, it is said that he believed that the Spirit of Allāh was inside Adam, and that this Spirit transmigrated until it became fixed inside his own heart.<sup>66</sup> This is an early example of the doctrine of "metempsychosis" that winds up becoming a part of orthodox Imāmī doctrine at a later date, especially in the works of al-Majlisī. It would seem that 'Abdallāh ibn Mu'awiyah was claiming to be the inheritor of some kind of esoteric knowledge; this specific type of spiritual elitism will become important in our discussion below. It is also important to note that this sect is seen to be Ḥanafid, like the sect before.<sup>67</sup> Their other very important belief seems to be the acceptance of *ibāḥah*: that everything is permissible, and that the *sharī'ah* does not apply for the believer. Al-'Asharī accuses them of "making permissible" the eating of carcasses and the drinking of alcohol, among other things. This, it is alleged, stems from their denial of the Day of Judgment, and their belief in the eternity of the world.

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<sup>62</sup> Ṣubḥānī *Buḥūth* 13.

<sup>63</sup> Daftary *Short History* 26-27.

<sup>64</sup> Tucker "Bayān" 242.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> An-Nawbakhtī 32.

<sup>67</sup> Ṣubḥānī *Buḥūth* 14.



3) The sect of ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Umar ibn al-Ḥarb. The only belief that is cited here is, once again, the idea of transmigration.

4) The sect of al-Mughīrah ibn Sa‘īd al-‘Ajālī. They trace their lineage to An-Nafs Az-Zakiyyah<sup>68</sup>, and claim that he did not really die, but is rather the awaited Mahdī. Supposedly, this sect claimed prophecy for themselves,<sup>69</sup> as well as knowledge of the Greatest Name of Allāh, the Name that is supposed to unleash all kinds of miraculous powers. He is seen to have had a stormy relationship with Imām al-Bāqir; at times it is said that he was a disciple of the Imām, and at other times that al-Mughīrah pressed Imām al-Bāqir to accept his status as a prophet. Mughīrah is also credited with believing in anthropomorphism, and gives a long description of God’s “body”. Al-‘Asharī’s account is, however, confused; the Mughīriyyah are classified at one point as *ghulāh*, while classified as seemingly mainstream “Rāfiḍah” elsewhere.<sup>70</sup> What is fascinating in the histories given of this sect is the relative unimportance of identifying a specific person as the successor to the Prophet. The confusion concerning al-Mughīrah’s specific views on the successor may be the result of polemicists; but Hodgson’s work demonstrates that primitive Shī‘ism existed in such a nebulous form during this period that the whole question of succession might have well taken a backseat to esoteric speculations. Even though the rebellion of al-Mukhtār and the subsequent Kaysāniyyah rebellions after him fought in the name of an ‘Alid (Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah), *ghulāh* like Bayān and Mughīrah do not seem to have been ‘Alid legitimists at all. Their shift in loyalties, and their tendency to posit themselves as prophets or Mahdis, would indicate that they did not believe that the supernatural attributes of an Imām were passed down solely by blood. Imāmī and extremist speculation concerning the ontological status of the Imāms do not seem to go hand in hand, even though it is only amongst ‘Alids that these Imāmological doctrines survives.

5) The sect of Abū Manṣūr. This sect seems to be specifically associated with the idea of *ibāḥah*, as well as the denial of the Day of Judgment. Heaven and Hell are interpreted as states that are experienced in this world, with no bearing on an afterlife. As will be discussed, this type of

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<sup>68</sup> Momen 51-52.

<sup>69</sup> A common motif for all “extremist” sects. Cf. Halm “Das Buch der Schatten I” 247.

<sup>70</sup> Buckley 307.

antinomianism becomes common amongst many later *ghulāh* who upheld the Imāmah of the Ḥusaynid line, such as Abū al-Khaṭṭāb.

6) The “general” sect of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb (*al-Khaṭṭābiyah al-Muṭlaqah*). We have already made some reference to this sect above. Al-ʿAsharī’s specific accusation against them is their belief that the Imāms were gods, and that Abū al-Khaṭṭāb was their Prophet. Al-ʿAsharī makes note of Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq’s excommunication of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, and attributes this to Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq discovering Abū al-Khaṭṭāb’s extremism. Another important belief of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, to be discussed below, was his idea that every believer was a prophet and received his own personal revelation.<sup>71</sup> It is important to note that Abū al-Khaṭṭāb is also generally credited with sparking the Ismāʿīlī movement, and is considered by some to be the “first true Ismāʿīlī”,<sup>72</sup> although Bayhom-Daou cites strong evidence to the contrary.<sup>73</sup>

7) The Muʿammar sect of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb. They are said to believe that Imāmah passed from Abū al-Khaṭṭāb to somebody referred to as Muʿammar, and that he was worshipped just as Abū al-Khaṭṭāb was.<sup>74</sup> They are also said to believe in *ibāḥah*: everything was permissible for them, including fornication and the abandonment of the canonical *ṣalāh*. Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq is also said to have cursed them.

8) The Buzaʿiyyah sect of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb. They are said to believe that everything that they sense inside their hearts is revelation.

9) The ʿUmariyyah sect of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb. They are said to worship Imām Jaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq as a God, and that he was their Lord. They are said to have set up a tent in Kūfah, where they gathered for the worship of Imām Jaʿfar, after which they were attacked and executed by government authorities.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Hodgson 12.

<sup>72</sup> Bayhom-Daou “Ghulāh” 35.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>74</sup> Lalani 54.

<sup>75</sup> Ṣubḥānī *Buḥūth* 16.

10) The Mufaḍḍaliyyah sect of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb. They are also said to refer to the “Lordship” (*rabūbiyyah*) of Imām Jaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq. Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar, the supposed founder of this sect, is heavily cursed by the *rijāl* scholars as one of the *ghulāh*, and as being a member of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb’s sect.<sup>76</sup> On the basis of a number of early narrations,<sup>77</sup> the medieval Shīʿah jurist ʿAllāmah al-Ḥillī goes so far as to say that it is entirely impermissible to narrate *ḥadīth*s from him<sup>78</sup>; once again, we see the vehemence of hatred that is directed towards those accused of *ghuluww*.<sup>79</sup> Mufaḍḍal, as well as his son,<sup>80</sup> plays a pivotal role in many “extremist” sects; the Nuṣayrī-Alawīs consider him to have been the esoteric “gate” to the eighth Imām ʿAlī Ar-Riḍā.<sup>81</sup> There is also a whole series of Ismāʿīlī works attributed to him as well.<sup>82</sup> Yet in spite of this he is credited with a very large number of narrations within the Qummī *ḥadīth* literature, and he also appears in the chains of al-Qummī’s *tafsīr*, a text that many Imāmī ʿulamāʾ consider to contain only reliable narrators.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, there is also a large number of other narrations that directly contradict those *ḥadīth*s that curse him, and where he is spoken of with great praise.<sup>84</sup> The contradiction may owe to the presence of differing factions within the Imāmī community; Mufaḍḍal is, no doubt, a controversial figure even amongst Imāmī Shīʿites today. Most important for our research purposes, however, is the continued existence of his *Tawḥīd*, which we will discuss below, as well as the esoteric (and, according to Halm, perhaps gnostic-inspired) *Kitāb al-Ḥaṭṭ wa al-Aẓīlah*.<sup>85</sup> Some have argued that these works were not composed until a somewhat later date, and only attributed to Mufaḍḍal, but there seems to be sufficient corroboration in the heresiographical literature to establish their “ancientness”.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Ibn Dawud 568; al-Ghazaʾiri 1:164; Halm “Das Buch der Schatten I” 224.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 239.

<sup>78</sup> al-Hillī *Rijāl* 275.

<sup>79</sup> Whole sections of the *rijāl* literature are devoted to his condemnation. Unsurprisingly, most of the narrations that condemn him come from narrators praised for their reliability. Cf. Halm “Das Buch der Schatten I” 227.

<sup>80</sup> Halm “Das Buch der Schatten I” 228.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 221.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 222.

<sup>83</sup> al-Khūʾī entry 12614.

<sup>84</sup> Though all of these narrations would be considered “weak” by the standards of the *rijāl* literature. The fact that those who have condemned this highly important and controversial figure are almost all classified as reliable and those who praise him are all considered weak is indicative of the degree to which the *rijāl* literature was molded for sectarian purposes. Cf. Halm Ibid. 228-235.

<sup>85</sup> Halm Ibid. 220.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Bayham-Daou 20.

11) al-'Asharī does not mention this sect's founder. They are merely referred to as believing that the Spirit of Allāh was inside the Prophet, and then passed on to 'Alī, and then the Twelve Imāms after them.

12) The proper *ghulāh*, who claim that 'Alī is God. They are also said to deny the prophecy of Muḥammad, who is said to have "stolen" his position from 'Alī. There seems to be little in the way of *ghulāh* literature to support the existence of such a sect, and it seems to be a polemical myth.

13) The companions of Ash-Sharīf. They are said to be incarnationists (*ḥulūf*), and believe in the descent of the Divine spirit into the Prophet, 'Alī, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, and Fātimah. As such, all five of them are regarded as Gods by this sect.

14) The sect of 'Abdallāh ibn Sabā, the "arch-extremist" to whom all extremist speculation is traced. He is attributed as believing that 'Alī did not die after his assassination in the mosque of Kūfah, and that he will return to the world before the end of time. He will fill it with justice, as it was filled with injustice before.<sup>87</sup> The historicity of 'Abdallāh ibn Sabā' has been debated by Imāmī and Sunnī scholars, and there are no sources contemporary to his alleged existence that could be used to establish whether he was a real person or not. An-Nawbakhtī and al-'Asharī, for their parts, are equally convinced of his existence, and report him as being the source of *sabb aṣ-ṣaḥābah*, cursing of the Prophet's companions (particularly Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthmān).

15) The final sect is said to have believed in the absolute demiurgic power of the Prophet. Nothing was created except through him, and Allāh has not created anything at all. All power, then, lies in his hands, and he is the ruler over all Creation.

The main themes of *ghuluww* that emerge from al-'Asharī's discussion are clear: divinity and worship of the Imāms; anthropomorphism; the claim to either prophecy or some other kind of esoteric knowledge; the transmigration of souls; and *ibāḥah*. The first theme, the deification of the Imāms, will be the focus of this work, as it is there that we find the most fruitful comparisons between

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<sup>87</sup> These words are the same as a famous *ḥadīth* of the Prophet concerning Imām al-Mahdī.

“extremist” sects and those of the Qumm school. The doctrine of *tahrīf* is also relevant, as it concerns the pre-eminent position of the *person* of the Imām over a Book (and the institution that surrounds that Book). The same applies to antinomianism, which cannot be separated from an Imāmology that posits “gnosis” of the Imām as being the source of all spiritual growth, supplanting the need for adherence to a ritual law.

Unfortunately, we cannot take al-’Asharī’s text as being absolutely authoritative in this regard: his work is unsystematic, and is almost entirely lacking in references for his claim. There is also the added problem, noted by Tucker, that most literature of this nature does not clarify the origins and developments of the doctrines under discussion.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, al-’Asharī has the particular problem of over-dividing sects, a problem that has been noted by Buckley.<sup>89</sup> Heresiographical scholars were often motivated by the attempt to conform their texts to the Prophetic *ḥadīth* stating that Islam will be divided into seventy-three sects. Arbitrary sub-divisions are then made in order to increase the number of sects to seventy-three.<sup>90</sup> He makes reference to the Hishāmiyyah sect of the famous theologian and disciple of Imām Ja’far aṣ-Ṣādiq, who are credited with believing in anthropomorphism,<sup>91</sup> but there is no evidence that Hishām was the leader of his own “sect” in the way that Abū al-Khaṭṭāb seems to have been. It is therefore difficult to isolate *which* of the “extremist” groups held which beliefs. Rather, with the heresiographical literature as our only real guide, we can only speak of tendencies concerning Imāmological speculation. Whether or not *any* of the sects listed by al-’Asharī actually existed is not something that can be unearthed from the available historical and heresiographical accounts, though the existence of individuals like Abū al-Khaṭṭāb and the *general* teachings associated with them seem beyond doubt, as the Sunni and Shī’ī heresiographical works corroborate each other’s reports on this point.

Buckley is correct that there are so many inaccuracies, confusions, and inconsistencies in both the *fiṣṭaḥ* works of Sunnī heresiographers like al-’Asharī and al-Baghdādī, as well as the somewhat more “selective” Shī’ite work of An-Nawbakhtī, that it is difficult to take these texts seriously. However, in the slew of allegations that are leveled against the *ghulāh*, there is one way of “triangulating” the information: an analysis of the theological works of groups that are considered to

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<sup>88</sup> Tucker “Bayān” 243-244.

<sup>89</sup> Buckley 303.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Moezzi 180.

be successors of the *ghulāh*. The belief that the Imāms are Divine, whether as an Incarnation of God or as a theophanic epiphany,<sup>92</sup> has become a codified article of faith in the theological works of many sects, including some Ismāʿīlīs, though it is made most explicit in the theology of the various ʿAlawī sects that exist in Pakistan, Kurdistan, Iran, and Syria. The most famous Muslim sect that claims such divinity are the Nuṣayrīs. The Nuṣayrīs are the only *ghulāh* sect that have a systematic theological literature, and attempt to deduce proofs for their position. Nuṣayrī theological works, in particular, largely confirm the *broad* outlines of what al-ʿAsharī describes as being “extremist”. It is not likely that a member of the powerful Nawbakhtī clan and noted theologian of the Shīʿites like Ḥasan ibn Mūsā An-Nawbakhtī would concur with al-ʿAsharī as much as he does if there were not some truth to their accusations, and it is more unlikely that a Nuṣayrī theologian like al-Khaṣībī writing in the same time would present a theology so similar to what al-ʿAsharī and An-Nawbakhtī were accusing the *ghulāh* of believing in. Comparing the work of An-Nawbakhtī, the work of al-ʿAsharī, the Nuṣayrī theological works, and the descriptions of the *ghulāh* in *rijāl* works such as that of the Shīʿī scholars al-Kashshī and An-Najāshī (d. 450/1058) allows us to confirm that the *fīraq* works are largely correct in their description of *ghulāh* theology. There is a striking degree of unanimity, even if the specific histories given of various *ghulāh* sects (the Kaysāniyyah in particular) sometimes differ.

The basic Nuṣayrī theology of the 4<sup>th</sup> century century contains all the elements al-ʿAsharī and An-Nawbakhtī assign to the *ghulāh*. The Nuṣayrīs usually claim their spiritual lineage from one Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr,<sup>93</sup> who is believed by the Nuṣayrīs to have been the “Gate” to the Twelfth Imām al-Mahdī, and had challenged the legitimacy of the first two representatives of the Twelfth Imām during the Short Occultation.<sup>94</sup> The Nuṣayrīs acknowledge the same Twelve Imāms as orthodox Imāmīs do,<sup>95</sup> but they regard the Imāms as fundamentally divine, the Incarnation of God.<sup>96</sup> Of all the many opinions that have been given as to exactly what the Nuṣayrīs believe, the idea that God

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<sup>92</sup> Corbin *Cyclical* 64.

<sup>93</sup> According to what is evident. Cf. Dussaud 9-11.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. ʿAlī, Javad 206-207, where a comparison is drawn between the Imāmī office of the “representative” (*ṣafīr*) and the Nuṣayrī office of “the Gate”, and the general office of Imāmate. His statement that the *ṣafīr*’s words have canonical status seems de-historicized;. As will be seen, the massive and sometimes violent disputes about who represented the Imām during the Occultation showed that the claims of the “four representatives” were far from universally accepted, and the elevation of their words to canonical status was a later development (cf. Momen 164-165).

<sup>95</sup> Moosa 352-356.

<sup>96</sup> Javad ʿAlībid.

manifested himself in the form of ‘Alī stands paramount.<sup>97</sup> Muḥammad also has a Divine status, as ‘Alī’s Prophet. With this, they derive a Trinitarian conception of God: the three “persons” are the Meaning, the Name, and the Gate, represented by the Arabic letters ‘Ayn, Mim, and Sin. The Gate leads towards the Name, and the Name towards the Meaning. The “Meaning of God” is said to be ‘Alī;<sup>98</sup> the Name is Muḥammad, and the gate is Salmān al-Farsī.<sup>99</sup> This classification is famous among the Ismā‘īlīs, but its presence among “extreme” Shī‘ites can be dated to quite early *ḥadīth* Nuṣayrī sources (circa 340).<sup>100</sup> God becomes incarnate in the form of ‘Alī, and He has incarnated Himself seven times through history.<sup>101</sup> They are also seen to believe in a certain kind of *ibāḥah*. In a debate between a Druze and a Nuṣayrī, the Nuṣayrīs are accused of “sexual communism”, whereby women are exchanged freely through the community.<sup>102</sup> Nuṣayrīs are also alleged to drink a kind of sacrificial wine, something that would obviously contradict Muslim norms. But there is a great liturgical tradition underlying their practices, with a number of holidays, initiation ceremonies, and other events that form the religious life of the community. Instead of *ibāḥah*, it might be better to describe them as having a different set of practices than Muslims.

The most important theologian of the Nuṣayrīs is Ḥusayn ibn Hamadan al-Khaṣībī (d. 346/957 or 358/968)<sup>103</sup>, who was a contemporary of al-Kulaynī (author of *al-Kāfī*) and frequently attacked as one of the *ghulāḥ*.<sup>104</sup> The fact that al-Khaṣībī lived in such an early period is very important. The somewhat sophisticated theology of al-Khaṣībī (explored best in the research of Bar-Asher and Kofsky) helps to corroborate al-‘Asharī’s description of *ghulāḥ* works. Even though many would argue that the Nuṣayrī sect did not come into existence until the fourth century *hijrī*,<sup>105</sup> proto-Nuṣayrī elements seem to have been well-current during the pre-*ghaybah* period, and it is important to remember that al-Khaṣībī was a disciple of Ibn Nuṣayr, who himself was a follower of the tenth Shī‘ah Imām, Imām ‘Alī al-Hādī An-Nāqī.<sup>106</sup> As would be expected, both Ibn Nuṣayr and al-Khaṣībī

<sup>97</sup> ‘Uthmān *al-Aḥwāl* 44-45.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Dussaud 45-46.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. 341-352.

<sup>100</sup> Strothmann *Esoterische* 5.

<sup>101</sup> Bar-Asher and Kofsky 171.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. 154-157.

<sup>103</sup> Momen 58; on him see Halm “Das Buch der Schatten I” 258-261.

<sup>104</sup> Ibn Dawūd 126; An-Najāshī 67. Aṭ-Ṭūsī mentions him without comment in his *Rijāl*, 423. He does not appear in any *isnāds* in the “orthodox” Imāmī *ḥadīth* literature.

<sup>105</sup> ‘Uthmān *Tarikh* 27.

<sup>106</sup> Momen 58.

are roundly abused in the *rijāl* literature and were exiled from the “mainstream” community<sup>107</sup>, and to this day they are reviled for believing in antinomianism (*ibāḥah*).<sup>108</sup> Some contemporary scholars have attempted to defend them from this accusation. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Ḥamd argues that al-Khaṣībī was not an antinomian, and in fact believed in the dual obligation of following *sharī‘ah* and *ḥaqīqah*,<sup>109</sup> but given the importance of dissimulation amongst the Nuṣayrīs, it is difficult to decide one way or the other. Al-Khaṣībī’s work helps demonstrate that al-‘Asharī was not simply “making it all up” in attributing these doctrines to a group within the Shī‘īte community. It is unlikely that a group like the Nuṣayrīs would have simultaneously developed *ghālī* doctrines out of the blue at the same time that al-‘Asharī was ascribing these doctrines to *ghulāh* groups before his time.

Regarding specific figures, such as Bayān or al-Mughīrah or Abū al-Khaṭṭāb), it is pretty much a hopeless task to discern what they believed in as individuals. It is also not clear whether or not extremist speculation actually began with ‘Abdallāh ibn Sabā’ (as all the heresiographers allege), or if it began with al-Mukhtār, or if it began with the Kaysaniyyah after al-Mukhtār. In any case, there seems no reason to deny the historicity of ‘Abdallāh ibn Sabā’: both the Sunnī and Shī‘ī heresiographers acknowledge his existence without question; he is condemned in historical sources like the *Tārīkh* of aṭ-Ṭabarī; revered in the esoteric texts of the Nuṣayrīyyah and, to some extent, the Ismā‘īlīs; and stories of his execution are recounted in the Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* literature. Such conformity concerning his existence amongst Sunnīs, Shī‘ah of various sects, and the *ghulāh* themselves would seem to make his existence undeniable. Given this unanimity, and given the unanimity about his beliefs and doctrines, it is highly probable that the *ghulāh* movement did, in fact, begin with him. There is little evidence to the contrary.

In addition to obvious “extremist” ideas like the Divinity of the Imāms, another salient feature of the *ghulāh* emerges from both the *fīraq* and the historical literature: the seeming uncommitment of the early *ghulāh* to any particular lineage of Imāms. The example of Bayān ibn Sam‘ān is telling. He is sometimes seen as being a supporter of the Ḥanafid line, and claiming for himself to be an Imām in that time. Other times, he is associated with the Ḥasanid line that reached

<sup>107</sup> Javad ‘Alī207.

<sup>108</sup> Bar-Asher and Kofsky have published a Druze polemical piece written against the Nuṣayrīs, and the main subject of attack is an alleged antinomian stance, especially a purported practice of sexual communism, in *The Nuṣayrī-Alawai Religion* 153-161.

<sup>109</sup> ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Ḥamd 164.



its peak in the figure of An-Nafs Az-Zakiyyah.<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, the historical evidence seems to indicate that Bayān rose up in alliance with al-Mughīrah ibn Sa'd, who is strongly associated with An-Nafs Az-Zakiyyah,<sup>111</sup> further throwing into question Bayān's own belief in Imāmah. If he was, as most commentators say, a supporter of the Ḥanafid Imāmah, then why did he revolt with somebody supporting the Ḥasanid Imāmah? It is possible that this was merely a matter of political expediency; but the point is that the sequence of historical events would make it very difficult to discern what Bayān's true beliefs were. The same applies for al-Mughīrah. Sometimes he is said to have upheld the Mahdīhood of Imām al-Bāqir (who was, of course, a Ḥusaynī), then the Ḥasanid line culminating in An-Nafs Az-Zakiyyah,<sup>112</sup> and then sometimes as a Zaydī.<sup>113</sup> In other literature he is seen to have claimed prophecy for himself, and challenged Imām al-Bāqir to accept him as a prophet. Then, after the death of Imām al-Bāqir, he is said to have believed that Imām al-Bāqir was either in Occultation, or would return from the dead, and that people should await him as the Mahdī.<sup>114</sup> Momen cites this as evidence that al-Mughīrah changed his position over the years (which is certainly a possibility)<sup>115</sup>, and this further supports Hodgson's thesis that in spite of growing speculation about the ontological and cosmological role of the Imām, the idea of a fixed, hereditary Imāmah had yet to become mainstream. Abū al-Khaṭṭāb and his alleged disciple al-Mufaḍḍal ibn 'Umar seem to be the first well-known *ghulāḥ* who threw himself behind one of the Ḥusaynid Imāms.

All of this is strong evidence that the *ghulāḥ* cannot (as some Sunnī polemicists, as well as Amir-Moezzi, have argued) be seen as the origins of early Imāmī Shī'ism, as Amir-Moezzi seems to imply in much of his work. The heresiographical works would seem to show that *ghulāḥ* "Imāmological" speculation began separately from most notions of 'Alid legitimism (and certainly Ḥusaynid legitimism and its corresponding doctrines of hereditary Imāmah) and that these two notions did not start to coalesce until the time of Muḥammad al-Bāqir, at the earliest. Even then, many *ghulāḥ* seem to be holding consistent theological and Imāmological notions while shifting from Imām to Imām, apparently deciding which 'Alid it was better to project these ideas upon.

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<sup>110</sup> Tucker Ibid. 244.

<sup>111</sup> Tucker "al-Mughīrah" 37.

<sup>112</sup> Tucker Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Momen 51-52;

<sup>114</sup> Lalani 53-54.

<sup>115</sup> Momen Ibid.

Other figures also seemed to have switched their loyalties during the period of Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq and after. Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, for example, is often associated with the Ismā'īlīs, and as being the first person to openly support the Imāmah of Ismā'il ibn Ja'far. Yet in spite of some evidence that he was the progenitor of Ismā'īlism, and the belief that the proto-Ismā'īlī *Umm al-Kitāb* contains some of his doctrines, Daftary argues that most Ismā'īlī literature condemns him.<sup>116</sup> What, then, were his true beliefs with regards to Imāmah? Bayhom-Daou has proposed an interesting explanation for these confusions: that later jurists, anxious to wipe out the *ghulāh* tendency in their community, attempted to attribute *ghulāh* ideas to other Shī'ites who followed *different* Imāms (such as the Ḥanafid line).<sup>117</sup> In other words, one way of discrediting *ghulāh* theology was to go a step further than usual. Rather than merely castigate certain followers of the Ḥusaynid Imāms as deviating from the actual teaching of those same Imāms, it was a much easier matter to simply claim that these “deviants” were not followers of the Ḥusaynid Imāms at all, but belonged to a different sect. This is a somewhat plausible thesis, but the vast majority of historical, *rijāl*, and heresiographical works identify all of the early *ghulāh* as early Ḥanafids, and this could not be explained as a mere Imāmī conspiracy.

#### Pejorative Use of the Word *Ghulāh* in the Books of *Rijāl*

*Ghālī* is obviously a pejorative term; any notion of “extreme” implies deviation from a norm. The amorphous nature of early Shī'ism meant that this term was always going to be used by those who considered another group as deviating from Islam in some form or another. In this regards, Hodgson writes:

The term *Ghulāh*, ‘exaggerators,’ was used by the later Imāmī Shī'ites, who liked to think of themselves as moderates, to designate as an extremist any other Shī'ī whose ideas particularly shocked them.<sup>118</sup>

The Shī'ite *rijāl* works help to shed light on what groups and what individuals were labeled by other Shī'ites as extreme, and why. The Shī'ite *ḥadīth* literature contains many *isnāds* with individuals who were blacklisted as extremists. A large number of such *ḥadīths* would be considered “weak” according to the dictates of *'ilm al-ḥadīth* and *'ilm Ar-rijāl*, as they were developed by Sunnī

<sup>116</sup> Daftary *Short History* 33-34.

<sup>117</sup> Bayhom-Daou “*Ghulāh*” 53.

<sup>118</sup> Hodgson 5.

'*ulamā*' and then adopted by later Shī'ah '*ulamā*' like 'Allāmah al-Ḥillī and Shahīd Ath-Thānī.<sup>119</sup>

Much of this weakness hinges on the fact that so many narrators were accused of *ghuluww*, and that this term was extremely vague and open to interpretation when the early texts of *rijāl* were being compiled.<sup>120</sup> In fact, once Shī'ah '*ulamā*' began to apply the principles of *jarḥ wa ta'dīl*, the sifting and categorizing of *ḥadīth* narrators based upon their purported reliability, the majority of *ḥadīths* in books like *al-Kāfī* become rejected on the grounds of weak *isnād*, owing to weak narrators. Yet, rather than these *ḥadīth* narrators openly being accused of dishonesty, we find that the much more common criticism in the Shī'ah *rijāl* literature is to dub somebody as one of the *ghulāḥ*. Interestingly enough, many accusations of extremism seem to be based upon the type of *ḥadīths* that the person narrated (usually *ḥadīths* that lend themselves towards the more esoteric ideas of Imāmah), or other things that the person wrote in praise of the bounties (*faḍ'ā'il*) of the Prophet's family. At this early period, there seemed to be certain sections of the Shī'ah community that were terribly anxious about attributing "too much" to the Imāms, and crossing the line from love of the Prophet's family (*tawālā* and *walāyah*) to the open assertion that the Imāms are God or, at least, God manifest in human form.<sup>121</sup>

The seemingly wide-spread nature of this anxiety also vitiates against Amir-Moezzi's thesis that early Imāmī Shī'ism was primarily an esoteric cult. This group of extremists seems to be particularly singled out in books of *rijāl*, indicating that the Imāmī community felt that there was some kind of alien encroachment entering upon their community. It should also be noted that the Shī'ah juristic tradition has always been willing to accept narrations from Sunnīs, Ismā'īlīs, *waqīfī* (those who believed that the Imāmah ceased with one of the Imāms), and others of "heretical" belief: a "correct" belief system is not considered to be a condition in accepting narrations, only personal veracity.<sup>122</sup>

This anxiety does not seem to be present before the time of Muḥammad al-Bāqir. Prior to this period, we find little to no accusations of *ghuluww* leveled against any of the disciples of the Imām 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn. Ṭūsī lists 170 companions for 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn in his *rijāl*.<sup>123</sup> Of them, there are only two who are even remotely associated *ghuluww*. Saḥīm ibn Qays, who was

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<sup>119</sup> Moussavi 27-32.

<sup>120</sup> Buckley 307-313.

<sup>121</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 130.

<sup>122</sup> al-Fadli 128.

<sup>123</sup> Ṭūsī *Rijāl* 107-120

considered to be a companion of ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib, and Abān ibn Abī Ayāsh Fayruz, who is cited as a companion of ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, and Ja’far aṣ-Ṣādiq and is implicated in forging the *ḥadīth* book attributed to Saḥīm ibn Qays.<sup>124</sup> This rather notorious text has been argued about by Imāmī scholars for many centuries. For the most, the criticisms which are directed at this text are for fables concerning Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr “advising” his father at death (even though Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr was only three years old when his father died)<sup>125</sup> and for claiming that the number of Imāms is thirteen, but little in the way of the kind of “esotericism” or mysticism that we will see in post-Bāqir narrators. Many of Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn’s companions are, of course, castigated in the *riḡāl* literature for becoming Zaydī, such as al-Ḥukm ibn ‘Utaybah,<sup>126</sup> but they are condemned for their deviations concerning *fiqh* issues and Imāmah, not for extremism.

The absence of extremist speculation amongst his followers is also evidenced by the nature of the splits that occurred in the wake of his death. Following Momen’s outline,<sup>127</sup> the main group to split off are the Zaydiyyah, who rejected the political quietism of Muḥammad al-Bāqir in favour of the revolutionary (but theologically unextreme) ideals spawned by the 740 revolt of al-Bāqir’s brother, Zayd ibn ‘Alī. As is known, Zaydism is devoid of any kind of mystical or esoteric Imāmology. While many Zaydī theologians consider ‘Alī, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn to have been appointed by *naṣṣ*<sup>128</sup>, the right to rule passes to the entire ‘Alid clan. In many ways, if the Nuṣayrīs can be taken as inheritors of the earlier extremist traditions, Zaydī doctrines of Imāmology can be seen as a reflection of pre-Bāqir Ḥusaynid legitimism, devoid of any mystical or esoteric elements. There are a number of different sub-groups of the Zaydiyyah: the Jārūdiyyah, the Sulaymāniyyah, and the Butriyyah (or, in Nawbakhti’s scheme, “the stronger” and “the weaker” Zaydiyyah).<sup>129</sup> All of these groups had a relatively moderate position concerning the succession to the Prophet. Their lack of emphasis on *tabarrā* (“disassociation” from the companions who rejected ‘Alī’s appointment, particularly noteworthy given their political radicalism), a doctrine that An-Nawbakhtī attributes to the heresiarch Ibn Sabā’, is noteworthy here. Not only was the “extreme” speculation about the Imām

<sup>124</sup> al-Khū’i *Riḡāl* entry 22.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. entry 5401; al-Majlisī *Biḡār* 30:133-134.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. entry 3875.

<sup>127</sup> Momen 50-51

<sup>128</sup> Helm *Shi’ism* 202.

<sup>129</sup> An-Nawbakhtī 57-58.

absent, but the wild hatred of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar is also not present. Most importantly, no *ghulāh* sects are said to have split off from the Ḥusaynid camp during the time of ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn.

The fact that the question of *khurūj* (rebellion) seemed to be the main concern of the Ḥusaynid faction, and that splits came about as a result of this, indicates that the “divinity” of the Imām was not an issue within this group. Yet, we know from the accounts given of al-Mukhtār and his followers that such ideas certainly existed at the time, and that much of this “extremist” speculation revolved around Muḥammad ibn Ḥanafiyyah. The absence of sectarian splits, as well as the absence of accusations of *ghuluww* leveled against the companions of ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, shows that these extremists did not start to make their presence amongst the Ḥusaynids until Muḥammad al-Bāqir. During this time, we see a rather drastic shift in the nature of Imāmī *rijāl* works: a whole slew of people who were clearly supporters of the Ḥusaynid line are accused of *ghuluww*.

If *ghulāh* speculation began amongst the Ḥanifids, and was separate from the nascent Ḥusaynid movement that supported the Imāmah of ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, an important historical question is who began to make *ghulāh* or quasi-*ghulāh* acceptable amongst some in the Ḥusaynid movement. Bayān ibn Sam‘ān seems to have pledged some kind of allegiance to al-Bāqir, at least for a little while; but the absence of narrations from him in the Imāmī *ḥadīth* sources and the near universal condemnation of him would make him an unlikely source. The most likely candidate is the fairly prolific *ḥadīth* narrator Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Ju‘fī (d. 128 or 132 *hijrī*).

#### Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Ju‘fī

Jābir is one of the earliest mystics and esotericists who enters into the Imāmī camp. Many of Jābir’s narrations became a key part of later Ismā‘īlī discourses, and there is an entire *Riṣalāh al-Ju‘fī* attributed to him. The famous proto-Ismā‘īlī work *Umm al-Kitāb* is also partially attributed to Jābir, and the heresiarch Abū al-Khaṭṭāb is reported as claiming that he was a spiritual successor to Jābir al-

Ju'fi.<sup>130</sup> This idea is also found in Nuṣayrī literature: just as Salmān was the Gate for the dyad of Muḥammad and 'Alī, so Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Ju'fī was the Gate for Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq.<sup>131</sup>

Imāmiyyah opinion is somewhat divided about him. The *rijāl* scholar al-Ghadhā'irī says about him: "He is reliable (*thiqah*) in and of himself. Nonetheless, the vast majority of people who narrate from him are weak".<sup>132</sup> Other '*ulamā*', such as An-Najāshī, say that his narrations are dubious, and emphasize once again the number of "weak" people who have narrated from him.<sup>133</sup> al-Kulaynī, for his part, narrates from Jābir 84 times within the *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, though al-Kulaynī must have had some suspicions about him as well. At one point, al-Kulaynī narrates a report where Jābir is seen to have gone insane, biding his time playing about with children in the court of some mosque.<sup>134</sup> In another narration, he stands before the people and starts announcing *ḥadīths* in the name of "the Successor of Successors, the Inheritor of the Knowledge of Adām, our Lord Muḥammad al-Bāqir," at which point the audience began to shout "Jābir has gone insane, Jābir has gone insane!"<sup>135</sup>

Little historical information is available about him. He is described as having been of ancient Arab origins,<sup>136</sup> and in a *ḥadīth* he describes himself as being from Kūfah.<sup>137</sup> The historian Aḥmad ibn Abī Ya'qūb (d. 284) lists Jābir as one of the *fuqahā*' of his time,<sup>138</sup> though most of his law related narrations in *al-Kāfī* are more related to *akhlāq* than specific legal issues. An-Najāshī feels that this is significant, and while discussing the weakness of those who use Jābir's *ḥadīth* as a source, comments that "he has narrated very little concerning the *ḥalāl* and the *ḥarām*," which seems like a subtle attempt to raise the possibility of that Jābir was some kind of antinomian.<sup>139</sup> He is also one of the earliest *ḥadīth* narrators accused of *ikhtilāf*, "mixing", which usually means "mixing" exoteric and esoteric (*bāṭinī*) narrations (though sometimes is used to mean that the narrator suffered from fits of mental illness). He is not reported as narrating from any of the prominent *ghulāḥ* of the Ḥanafid movement, and almost all of his narrations are reported directly from al-Bāqir himself. This is

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<sup>130</sup> Jafri 302.

<sup>131</sup> Moosa 352. The same is also believed by the more orthodox Shaykhī sect of Imāmī Shī'ism; in fact the system of gates amongst the Shaykhīs and the Imāmīs seems to be largely the same, at least before the Twelfth Imām. Cf. Amir-Moezzi "Absence" 45.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> *al-Kāfī* 1:397.

<sup>135</sup> al-Khu'ī entry 2033.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> al-Kashshī 2:438.

<sup>138</sup> Ibn Abī Ya'qūb, *Tarīkh* 2:348.

<sup>139</sup> al-Khu'ī entry 2033.

important, as it indicates that he was not basing his teachings on anything associated with the previous Imāms. The *rijāl*/works attribute him with a number of *ḥadīth* books, most of which seem to deal with the martyrdom of the Imāms. In addition to the *‘aṣ*/that is attribute to him, these include:

Book of *Nawādir* [rare narrations], the Book of *Faḍā’il* [attributes of the Imāms], the Book of the Battle of Jamal, the Book of the Battle of Siffin, the Book of the Battle of Nahrwān, the Book of the Martyrdom of the Prince of Believers, the Book of the Martyrdom of Ḥusayn, the Letter of Abū Ja’far [al-Bāqir] to the People of Baṣrah [alleged to be forged].<sup>140</sup>

Most of what is narrated from him, however, does not concern these historical topics. Jābir’s corpus of *ḥadīth* are the first that start positing the Imām as a means of knowing God *Himself*, rather than just God’s *law*. Given the relatively large number of quasi-*ghāḥ* narrations ascribed to him, and the important role he plays in both *ghulāh* and Ismā’īlī esotericism, Jābir seems to be the most likely candidate for introducing extremist speculation into the Ḥusaynid community. Even though he does not appear to have been associated with the Ḥanafid movement, he most likely picked up on *ghulāh* teachings while a young man in Kūfah. At some point he decided to leave Kūfah and move to Madīnah, in order to seek “knowledge” (*ṭalab al-‘ilm*) from Muḥammad al-Bāqir. In classic esotericist fashion, he describes himself as being the recipient (on first meeting with al-Bāqir) of two secret books: one which must be kept secret until the fall of Banī Umayyah, and the other which must be kept secret forever. This report is narrated by al-Kashshī:

Jābir narrates: “I came to Abū Ja’far [al-Bāqir] when I was a young man. He said to me: ‘Who are you?’ I said: ‘I am from the people of Kūfah.’ He asked: ‘And from who are you descended?’ I said: ‘From Ju’fi.’ He asked: ‘And what has brought you to Madīnah?’ I said: ‘Seeking knowledge.’ He then said: ‘Well, if anybody asks you, tell them that you are from the people of Madīnah.’ I said to him: ‘Well, before anything else, I want to ask you about that. Are you allowing me to lie?’ He said: ‘This is not a lie. Whoever is in Madīnah, then he is from the people of Madīnah until he leaves.’ He then gave me a book, and said to me: ‘If you speak about anything in this book before Banī Umayyah is destroyed, then you will have the curse of me and my forefathers. And if you conceal any of this after the destruction of Banī Umayyah, then you will have the curse of me and my forefathers.’” He then gave me another book, and said: “If you speak about anything in this book *ever*, then you will have the curse of me and my forefathers”.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>140</sup> al-Khū’i entry 2033.

<sup>141</sup> al-Kashshī 2:438.

Elsewhere he emphasizes his degree of esoteric knowledge by bragging: “I have narrated 50,000 *ḥadīth*, none of which has anybody ever heard from me”,<sup>142</sup> and in another narration: “al-Bāqir narrated 90,000 *ḥadīth* to me, none of which have I reported to anybody, nor has anybody else ever reported them”.<sup>143</sup> His rather ambiguous position amongst later Imāmī scholars of *ḥadīth* and *rijāl* and his rather exalted position amongst the Ismāʿīlīs and the Nuṣayrīs is most likely due to these esoteric claims, which were certainly not recorded by al-Kashshī and aṭ-Ṭūsī as items of praise. His emphasis that he is the *only* one with the knowledge of these secret *ḥadīths* also makes it more likely that he was, in fact, the first amongst the Imāmī Ḥusaynids to begin introducing esotericist elements into the ideological mix.

In the narrations that he did choose to pass on, he consistently lays emphasis on the importance of knowledge of the Imām as knowledge of God Himself. These narrations are often cited in Qumm school texts, as we will see. A primitive negative theology is offered, to which the Imām is consistently seen as the solution. In Jābir’s corpus, it is considered absolutely *impossible* to have any knowledge of God whatsoever without knowledge of the Imām, a knowledge that (given the esotericism he expressed in other narrations) was probably viewed by him as being of a “secret” order. It is also very important to note that, while al-Kulaynī narrates 84 *ḥadīth* from Jābir (most of which are of an Imāmological or theological nature), neither he or any of the other Qummī scholars pass on his claims to esoteric knowledge. As has been discussed, the Qummī scholars were not esotericists and seem disinterested in such claims, but they were sufficiently interested in his way of resolving the *via negativa* in favour of an Imāmology. Examples are the following:

Indeed, the one who knows Allāh the Exalted and Glorified and worships Him is the one who knows Allāh and knows the Imām from the Ahl al-Bayt. He who does not know Allāh and the Imām from the Ahl al-Bayt worships somebody other than Allāh. I swear by Allāh, that this is true misguidance.<sup>144</sup>

Jābir’s narrations also teach that the Imāms are pre-cosmic entities, created before all the rest of creation. Such doctrines are not known to have been in existence amongst the Ḥusaynid Imāmīs before al-Bāqir, but Jābir appears to have been critical in bringing such teachings into the

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<sup>142</sup> al-Khūʿī entry 2033.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> *al-Kāfī* 1:181.



community: Jābir's narrations are also very explicit in terms of *tafwīd*, the doctrine that the Imāms are delegated power from Allāh to rule over the creation, and are the cause of its continued existence. The following *ḥadīth* from Muḥammad al-Bāqir, reported by Jābir, is a typical example:

Abū Ja'far [al-Bāqir] said: "O Jābir, the first beings that God created were Muḥammad and his family, the rightly guided ones and the guides; they were the phantoms of light before God." I asked, "And what were the phantoms?" al-Bāqir said: "Shadows of light, luminous bodies without spirits; they were strengthened by the Holy Spirit, through which Muḥammad and his family worshipped God. For that reason, He created them forbearing, learned, endowed with filial piety, and pure; they worship God through prayer, fasting, prostrating themselves, enumerating His names, and ejaculating: God is great".<sup>145</sup>

The following conversation, recorded by Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq in his *ʿIlal Ash-Sharāʿi*, explains the doctrine of *tafwīd* in standard fashion. Here, the Imāms are portrayed as being as fixed a part of the earthly order as the stars are of the heavenly order. Their presence amongst the people prevents God's wrath from descending upon them, and their removal from the earth would lead to its destruction:

Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Ju'fi asked Imām al-Bāqir: 'What reason do people always need the Prophet and Imāms?' To which he said: "In order to sustain the universe in its proper way. This is because Allāh the Glorified and Exalted has lifted the punishment up from the people of the earth so long as there is a Prophet or Imām amongst them. And so Allāh the Glorified and Exalted has said: 'Allāh will not punish a people while you are amongst them.' And the Prophet said: 'The stars are the safeguard for the people of the heavens, and my Ahl al-Bayt are the safeguard for the people of the earth. If the stars were to leave, the people of the heavens would have to face that which they would hate. And if my Ahl al-Bayt were to leave the earth, the people of the earth would have to face that which they hate.'"

Imām al-Bāqir then explained: 'He meant by 'My Ahl al-Bayt' the Imāms which Allāh has ordered the people to obey. And so Allāh has: 'Obey Allāh and obey the Prophet and the holders of authority from amongst you.' And they are the infallible ones who do not sin and do not disobey God.

"They are the ones assisted, supported, and guided by God. Through them, Allāh sustains his servant, and through them the lands are settled, and through them the rain comes from the sky, and through them the blessings pour forth from the earth. Through them, the people of disobedience are given respite, and the punishment and torment is not hastened towards them. The Holy Spirit does not separate from them, nor do they separate from him. The Qur'ān does not separate from them, nor do they separate from them. Blessings of Allāh be upon them".<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Jafri 301

<sup>146</sup> Aṣ-Ṣadūq *ʿIlal* 1:150.

Elsewhere Jābir narrates a *ḥadīth* concerning the nature of Fāṭimah, where she is portrayed as being an entity of light, created by God before all the rest of creation.

I said to Abū ‘Abdillāh [aṣ-Ṣādiq]: “Why is Fāṭimah the Radiant named the Radiant?” The Imām replied: Because Allāh the Mighty and Glorified created her from the Light of His Glory. When she radiated (*ishraqat*), she illuminated the heavens and the earth with her light. The vision of the angels were *overwhelmed*, and they collapsed before Allāh in prostration. They said: “Our God and Master, what is this Light?” And so Allāh revealed to them: “This Light is from my Light, and I bring it to repose in my Heavens. I created it from my Glory, and will draw it out from the greatest Prophet of my prophets. From this, I will draw forth the Light of the Imāms who will rise with my command, who will guide to my Truth, and whom I will make my representative to the earth once my revelation is complete.”<sup>147</sup>

Other narrations of Jābir deal with the idea that the Imām is of superior status to the Prophets, and that being selected as an Imām by Allāh is the highest possible station that anybody can reach in Creation. He narrates:

I heard Abū Ja’far [al-Bāqir] saying: “Indeed, Allāh made Ibrahim a servant (*‘abd*) before He made him a Messenger (*rasūl*). He made him a Messenger before He made him a Prophet (*rasūl*). He made him a Prophet before he made him an Intimate (*khalīf*). And He made him an Intimate before He made him an Imām. When Allāh had granted him all these things and closed His Hand, it was only then He said: “Indeed, I am making you an Imām to the people.”<sup>148</sup>

Jābir is ascribed far more mystical statements in Ismā‘īlī works, where he is said to describe his spiritual experiences of Imām Ja’far aṣ-Ṣādiq. No such teachings are ever connected with followers of ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn:

Jābir thought to himself: “This man [the Imām] is the Veil. What then will be he whom he veils?” The Imām, having telepathically heard this question in Jābir’s mind, raised his head upwards. Then Jābir said: “I saw an extraordinary splendour gleaming in him, a dazzling light that my eyes could scarcely sustain or my intelligence contain”. And the Imām said: “Should I show you still more?” “No”, said Jābir. “This is my measure.”<sup>149</sup>

There is no doubt that Jābir was a controversial figure in his own time and in subsequent generations. There is no reason he should not have been; the idea that the Imām is a superhuman entity who precedes the creation and is responsible for its management, and the idea that the office of

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<sup>147</sup> Aṣ-Ṣadūq *‘Ilal* 1:213-214.

<sup>148</sup> *al-Kāfi* 1:175.

<sup>149</sup> Corbin *Cyclical* 143.

Imāmah is superior to that of Prophet, were new within the Ḥusaynid fold. The fact that he was accused of insanity for describing al-Bāqir as “the inheritor of Adam’s knowledge” is sufficient to show that. Ziyād ibn Abī Hilāl narrates a discussion he had with Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq about this, which is cited by al-Najāshī. He says:

Our companions had a dispute about the narrations of Jābir al-Ju’fī, and so I said: ‘I will ask Abū ‘Abdillāh [aṣ-Ṣādiq] about this’. When I went to see him about this, he spoke first [i.e., without Ziyād having said anything], saying: “May Allāh have Mercy upon Jābir, for he has spoken the truth about us. And may Allāh curse al- Mughīrah ibn Sa’d, for he has lied about us”.<sup>150</sup>

The contrast between Jābir and Mughīrah is also interesting here; both narrate a very similar genre of *ḥadīths*, but Mughīrah is still being cast as an outsider, a trouble maker, and an extremist. The interesting thing about this *ḥadīth*, as well, contains a certain “extremist” quality. It would seem from the narration that Imām Ja’far had read Ziyād’s mind, for according to the narration Ziyād never actually asked him anything about Ja’far or al- Mughīrah. This *ḥadīth*, then, would also fit in the larger scheme of narrations that attribute miraculous and psychic powers to the Imāms.<sup>151</sup>

While many considered Jābir to be reliable in and of himself, those who narrate from him (other than the main Qummī scholars, like al-Kulaynī, aṣ-Ṣaffār al-Qummī and Aḥī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, in great bulk usually are not. The main weak narrators who report from Jābir (and whose use of him, therefore, is taken as a sign against him) in the Imāmī *ḥadīth works* are:

- 1) ‘Amr ibn Shīmr, another Kūfan who is classed as “extremely weak” by An-Najāshī and others<sup>152</sup>, though he is vetted by Aḥī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (author of the *Tafsīr al-Qummī*). He narrates from Jābir 141 times, out of a total 167.
- 2) Mufaḍḍal ibn Ṣāliḥ, who died during the time of ‘Aḥī ar-Riḍā. He was a *mawlā* of Banū Asad, the same as Abū al-Khaṭṭāb. Ibn al-Ghaḍā’irī says of him: “He was weak, and a great liar. He

<sup>150</sup> Qtd. in al-Khū’ī entry 2033.

<sup>151</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 93.

<sup>152</sup> al-Khū’ī entry 8938.

forged *ḥadi.th*. It is reported that he said: 'I forged the letter of Mu'awiyah to Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr."<sup>153</sup>

- 3) Ismā'īl ibn Abi Ziyād as-Sakūnī, a rather prolific narrator in the Qummī books, who was a Kūfan Sunnī. As is obvious, he is not accused of *ghuluww*, but the concerns are about his Sunnism; it is interesting that, in spite of the clear gap between him and Jābir, he is one of Jābir's more prolific narrators.
- 4) Minkhal ibn Jamīl al-Asadī, another Kūfan who lived during the time of aṣ-Ṣādiq, also from the Asād clan. An-Najāshī describes him as "weak, with corrupt narrations", and Ibn al-Ghaḍā'irī classifies him as one of the *ghulāh*.

Again, one notices the Kūfan connection in the accusations, and in spite of spending an apparently substantial part of his life in Madīnah with Muḥammad al-Bāqir, he seems to have had the most influence within his native Kūfah. After his death, his influence spreads: the Qumm school scholars use many of his narrations as the basis for their negative theology and Imāmological mysticism, while censoring his esoteric claims, while the Ismā'īliyyah use his esoteric apocalypses and rarely cite his theological or Imāmological narrations.

#### Moderate Responses: Hishām ibn al-Hakam

The influx of *ghulāh* or neo-*ghulāh* like Jābir caused great consternation in the Imāmī community, and the Imāms themselves are rarely portrayed as being neutral in this regard. The Imāmī theologian Hishām ibn al-Hakam (d. 179/975) is often portrayed as being at the forefront of the ideological battle against the *ghulāh*, as well as anybody else in the Imāmī community who attributed anything more to the Imāms than infallibility. Hāshim is most well known for his rationalist defence of Imāmah, infallibility, and *naṣṣ*.<sup>154</sup> Bayhom-Daou argues that he first really started to come into his own during the Mu'tazilite heyday of Harūn Ar-Rashīd,<sup>155</sup> where his skill at

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid. entry 12607.

<sup>154</sup> See Bayhom-Daou "Hishām" 75.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

apologetics first began to shine. The titles of works attributed give a good sense of his intellectual interests:

The Causes of Prohibitions, the Book of Obligations, the Book of Imāmah, the Book of Evidences on the Createdness of Physical Bodies, the Book in Refutation of the Atheists, the Book in Refutation of the Dualists, the Book of Monotheism, the Book in Refutation of Hishām al-Jawālīqī, the Book in Refutation of the Naturalists, the Book of the Master and Disciple Discussing Monotheism, the Book of Reflection upon Imāmah, The Book of the Scale, the Book on the Imāmah of the Lesser-Qualified, the Book of Pre-destination and Freewill, the Book the Two Rulings, the Book in Refutation of the Mu'tazilah and Talha and Zubayr, the Book on Predestination, the Book on Linguistic Expressions,<sup>156</sup> the Book on Capacity, the Book on Wisdom, the Book of Eight Chapters, the Book on the Devil, the Book on the Narrations, the Book in Refutation of the Mu'tazilah, the Book in Refutation of Aristote (!) with Regards to Monotheism, the Book of Gatherings<sup>157</sup> Concerning Monotheism, the Book of Gatherings Concerning Imāmah.<sup>158</sup>

His take on the status of the Imāms can be reflected in the way that he approached the subject matter. In one curious debate, Hishām argues that infallibility is a unique attribute of the Imāms and the Imāms only; the Prophet does *not* have the attribute of infallibility.<sup>159</sup> Rather, because the Prophet was a man who received revelation, he could be corrected directly by God without the need for infallibility. The Imāms, on the other hand, do not receive revelation at all; therefore, an extra “safe-guard” must be put in to keep them from deviating. The Prophet, on the other hand, is seen to be able to dispense with this attribute, because of his more direct link with God. Such a portrayal of the Imām is very different from that given by Jābir’s notions above, where the Imāms are seen to be fundamentally *different* human beings whose connection to God is extremely clear. Furthermore, Jābir’s narration concerning the supremacy of Imāmah over Prophethood is the polar opposite of Hishām’s view, where the Imāms are in *need* of infallibility owing to their lack of revelation.

Madelung’s discovery of Hishām’s heresiographical text *Kitāb Ikhtilāf An-Nās fi al-Imāmah*

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<sup>156</sup> One of the most important themes in Shī‘ah *uṣūl al-fiqh*. The attribution of works of this nature to such an early disciple may seem questionable, given the primitive nature of Shī‘ah *uṣūl* at this stage; nonetheless, questions and discussions about language go quite far back in the Muslim world, even to the Prophet’s companions (especially Ibn ‘Abbas, the premier “linguist” of the first century). Cf. Rubin 15-25.

<sup>157</sup> This probably refers to specific dictation sessions.

<sup>158</sup> al-Khū‘ī entry 13358.

<sup>159</sup> Bayhom-Daou “Hishām” 76. There were Ismā‘īlī scholars who made a superficially similar argument, but this was only for the sake of establishing the precedence of ‘Alī over the Prophet, which was the opposite intention of Hishām.

(The Book of the Disagreements Amongst People Concerning Imāmah) as source text for An-Nawbakhtī's heresiographical work draws out Hishām's contempt for many of the *ghulāh* at his time. An-Nawbakhtī's work is also highly "moderate" and assigns practices such as *tabarrah* and insulting of the *ṣahābah* to the *ghulāh*, practices that are quite widespread in the Imāmī world today. Bayhom-Daou is probably correct, however, that An-Nawbakhtī did make various interpolations in Hishām's text in order to create his own heresiographical text, but the broad outlines of Hishām's view on Imāmah and the very different interpretation of it given by people like Jābir can be assumed to be correctly represented by An-Nawbakhtī (in spite of the fact that An-Nawbakhtī himself held that the sources of the Imām's knowledge are inspirational and Divine).<sup>160</sup> Even An-Nawbakhtī himself is accused by Shaykh al-Mufīd of holding to certain "extremist" doctrines, like the idea that the Imāms know all arts and languages,<sup>161</sup> showing that An-Nawbakhtī himself was another compromiser between the tradition of Jābir and the far more moderate position of Hishām.

If Hishām's work is one of the source-texts for An-Nawbakhtī, then Hishām's treatment of the Ḥanafid movement is also important in this regard. Al-Mukhtār is portrayed as not believing in the Imāmah of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn at all, but that they were rather only acting with the permission and instructions of Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyah himself.<sup>162</sup> As Bayhom-Daou notes, this seems to be part of a general effort to portray al-Mukhtār as a revolutionary secessionist, similar to the Zaydiyyah, but with far more heretical beliefs. By claiming that he denied the Imāmah of 'Alī's first two sons, this would certainly place him far, far outside of the Imāmī camp by any standards. It is also interesting to note how al-Mukhtār is also portrayed as claiming revelation, and that he is also (apparently pejoratively) described as being one of those who condemned the first three caliphs as unbelievers,<sup>163</sup> which is still being portrayed as *ghuluww* even at An-Nawbakhtī's late date. The collision of Jābir's mysticism and Hishām's rationalism would spark a number of explosive events during the time of Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq.

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid. 81.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. 82.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid. 87-89. This doctrine seems to foreshadow later Ismā'īlī views of the "stand-in Imām" (*al-imām al-mustawda*).

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. 87.

## Excommunications

Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam’s battle seems to have paid off with the excommunication of a number of the *ghulāh* or neo-*ghulāh* from the community. One of the most famous incidents in this regard was the “ex-communication” of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb by Imām Ja’far aṣ-Ṣādiq. Muḥammad ibn Abī Zaynab Abū al-Khaṭṭāb was a Kūfan cloth merchant,<sup>164</sup> one of the *mawālī*, and of the people of Kūfah.<sup>165</sup> He is normally listed as a companion of Ja’far, and seems to have not entered into the community until his time. As discussed above, he is often portrayed as a successor to Jābir. In spite of whatever extremist leaning Abū al-Khaṭṭāb may have had, he was welcomed into the Imāmī community. Abū al-Khaṭṭāb was appointed as Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq’s supreme representative in Kūfah, but once he began to manifest a more radical theological stance, Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq disowned him and began to disassociate from him.<sup>166</sup> Abandoned (at least publicly) by his Imām, Abū al-Khaṭṭāb is said to have been killed (along with his followers) in the mosque of Kūfah (interestingly enough, the same mosque where ‘Alī himself is supposed to have died), after setting up a tent where they began to worship Ja’far as God.

The Imāmī scholars view him as a heresiarch, worse so than ‘Abdallāh ibn Sabā’ himself. Unlike Jābir, he is listed by al-‘Asharī and An-Nawbakhtī as being one the main “instigators” of extremist speculation. Ibn al-Ghaḍā’irī says of him: “May Allah curse him. His affair is well known. I believe that our companions should not narrate from him at all, even in the time when he was still a man of right faith.”<sup>167</sup> The bizarre and clearly suicidal way Abū al-Khaṭṭāb ended his life (for surely he realized that publically worshiping Ja’far as God in a major mosque would provoke a violent response) indicates that his “revolt” had no ultimate political objective, but was purely designed to make some kind of “statement” of a religious order, a kind of “last-stand” as a leader of the *ghulāh*.

Some of his “exaggerations” include the teaching that the Imāms were, in fact, new prophets, and that he and his followers were Divine proofs over humanity, and that the Imāms were omniscient, with knowledge of all that ever was and what would be, and<sup>168</sup> that the Imāms were said to be the

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<sup>164</sup> The appellation “cloth merchant” may simply have been a cultural synonym for “stupid” or “uneducated” at the time.

<sup>165</sup> al-Khū’i entry 10012

<sup>166</sup> Daftary *Short History* 33.

<sup>167</sup> al-Khū’i *Ibid*.

<sup>168</sup> Moosa 314.

incarnation of the Divine Light.<sup>169</sup> al-'Asharī writes about him and his followers:

The companions of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb ibn [Abī] Zaynab consist of five sects. But all of them claim that the Imāms are Prophets, and that they are spoken to by angels (*muḥaddath*), and that they are messengers of Allāh and the Proofs of Allāh over Creation. Furthermore, there will always be two such prophets: one will be the Speaker, the other the Silent. The Speaker was Muḥammad – peace be upon him – and the Silent One was 'Alī ibn 'Alī Ṭālib. They are supposed to exist in the world today, and the obedience of all Creation is owed to them. They know everything that is, and everything that will be. They also state that Abū al-Khaṭṭāb was a Messenger, and that they themselves are Prophets, and so obedience to Abū al-Khaṭṭāb is prescribed for them.<sup>170</sup>

The doctrines that are ascribed to him are very similar to later Ismā'īlī motifs, especially the concept of the Speaker (the *nāṭiq*) and the Silent-One (*aṣ-ṣāmī*). The self-deification and belief in post-Muḥammad prophecy are typical trademarks of the *ghulāb*, and show a definite Ḥanafid inspiration. Abū al-Khaṭṭāb is not usually ascribed as having those particular beliefs in the Ismā'īlī sources which praise him, so it is impossible to verify how “extreme” he was in that regard. Whatever he preached, it clearly provoked terrible consternation on the part of Ja'far, who finally severed all ties with the man and left him to his fate. In one narration, we read:

'Isā ibn Abī Maṣṣūr said: “The name of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb was mentioned to Abū 'Abdillāh [aṣ-Ṣādiq], and I heard him say: ‘O Allāh, curse Abū al-Khaṭṭāb. Indeed he scares me, whether he be standing, sitting, or lying down. O Allāh, make him taste the fire of the hottest irons.’”<sup>171</sup>

For the most part, Abū al-Khaṭṭāb's narrations are excised from the Imāmī literature. Unlike Jābir, he clearly went so far that no amount of censorship would make using his teachings acceptable. If Jābir was an esotericist who bragged about his ability to keep a secret, Abū al-Khaṭṭāb seemed to have no such discipline. In many ways, his public blasphemy and his resultant death was similar to the way that the Ṣūfī al-Ḥallāj would end his life a century and a half later. The praise that is given to figures like Jābir as well as Hishām by the Imāms in the *ḥadīth* and *rijāl* literature may very indicate a tendency, on the part of Ja'far, to strike a balance between these two elements. But some individuals in the extremist camp could not be tolerated. Ja'far's appointment of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb as his

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<sup>169</sup> Daftary *Short History* 33.

<sup>170</sup> al-'Asharī 10-11.

<sup>171</sup> al-Khū'ī entry 10012.



representative to Kūfah was clearly a miscalculation, and this was probably the last place that such a person should have been sent. It is not possible to determine whether or not Ja'far's condemnations were because of what Abū al-Khaṭṭāb said, or just because he said it, but it is clear that his presence in the community was far too disruptive for Ja'far to tolerate.

The circumstances of his death would seem to indicate that, by the time of aṣ-Ṣādiq, many of the Kūfan extremists had already migrated to the Ḥusaynid camp, where quasi-*ghulāh* ideas were starting to be given a stamp of legitimacy (in some quarters) by Jābir ibn Yazīd. Jābir himself seems to be silent on the issue of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb's apostacy, as there is nothing narrated from him concerning the crisis that Abū al-Khaṭṭāb unleashed.

Though Abū al-Khaṭṭāb's work has been deleted from the Imāmī literature, the work of one of his alleged disciples was not. This is the Kūfan Mufaḍḍal ibn 'Umar al-Ju'fī. Mufaḍḍal ibn 'Umar is accused of being a follower of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb throughout the *riḡāl* literature, and is listed as the founder of a sub-sect of the Khaṭṭabiyyah by al-'Asharī, as discussed above. Classic extremist ideas are attributed to him, specifically the belief in the Divinity of Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq. An-Najāshi says of him: "He was corrupt in his religion, confused in his narrations. It is said of him that he was one of the Khaṭṭabiyyah. He has many works, none of which can be relied upon."<sup>172</sup>

While we do not have much in the way of works attributed to Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, we do have much from al-Mufaḍḍal. al-Kulaynī narrates from him sixty-four times in *al-Kāfī*, making him the second most prominent narrator of quasi-extremist ideas within his work, after Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Ju'fī. Al-Mufaḍḍal is most known for a philosophical tract entitled the *Tawḥīd al-Mufaḍḍal*, also known as the *Kitāb al-Fikhr* ("The Book of Thought"). His other works include: "The Beginning of Creation and the Importance of Reflection," "the Testament of al-Mufaḍḍal," and "the Book of the Causes of Religious Rulings."<sup>173</sup> The gnostic *Kitāb al-Haḡ wa al-Azillāh* is also attributed to him, which shows a level of philosophical sophistication not known amongst the Ḥanafid *ghulāh*.

The book of *Tawḥīd* is a significant milestone in terms of *ghulāh* thought. The work purports to be a series of philosophical lessons dictated to him by Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq. It is primarily a theological and philosophical text, with little to say on issues of Imāmology, though it lays down a theological framework by which Mufaḍḍal's other narrations concerning the ontological status of the Imāms

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<sup>172</sup> al-Khū'i entry 12615.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

becomes intelligible. The book of *Tawhīd* begins, importantly enough, with arguments in favour of a negative theology. The intellect is seen as being unable to comprehend its creator in anyway, and so it is only charged with following the laws that are revealed to it. Knowledge of the attributes is not required. This seems to be an early expression of *ta'zīl*, the “stripping away of Divine attributes,” a theology advocated by the Ismāʿīliyyah but usually criticized by the Qummī scholars if taken to extremes (as will be discussed) We read:

We say: The intellect knows the Creator in terms of what it knows that it must accept, not in terms of what it encompasses of the Creator's attributes. If they would say: 'How can the weak servant be charged with knowing the Creator through his subtle intellect, if the intellect does not encompass it him?' then it should be said to them: The servants are only charged with what it is in their capacity to reach, and this is only that they have absolute certainty of Him, and they will obey whatever He commands and desist from whatever He prohibits. They are not tasked with knowing His Attributes, just as a king does not charge his subjects with knowing whether or not he is tall or short, or whether he is white or dark. Indeed, he only charges them with the task of being obedient to his power and following his commands. If a man went to the door of a king, and said: 'Tell me everything about yourself until I learn what you are, or otherwise I will not obey you,' then, no doubt, such a person would bring upon himself a terrible punishment. Such is the case of a person who refuses to acknowledge the Glorious Creator until he understands His Essence (*kunh*); by doing so he opens himself up to the Divine Wrath.<sup>174</sup>

The entrance of the negative theology seems to be al-Mufaḍḍal's (or aṣ-Ṣādiq's) own, as there is nothing in any of the heresiographical or historical literature that ascribes this particular argument to Abū al-Khaṭṭāb. It is curious that, given al-Mufaḍḍal's alleged association with Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, these works have remained in existence and were not eliminated by subsequent authors. The main reason for this is that, probably unlike Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, his works could be made use of; as we will discuss in the next chapter, the Qummī scholars lay a great deal of emphasis on the *via negativa*, and al-Mufaḍḍal seems to be one of the early sources for this methodology (alongside of his clansman Jābir ibn Yazīd). In spite of his associations, he was sufficiently useful for the Qumm school, who often go out of their way to establish that al-Mufaḍḍal was a supporter of the Imāmah of Mūsā al-Kāzīm after the death of aṣ-Ṣādiq, rather than painting him as an outsider.<sup>175</sup>

The instabilities produced by the influx of the extremists, and the embarrassing affair of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, started to put both the neo-*ghulāb* and the moderates under Ja'far's spotlight. At a time

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<sup>174</sup> al-Mufaḍḍal 177.

<sup>175</sup> al-Khū'i Ibid.

when doctrines of Imāmah were just beginning to be formalized, people on both sides of the debate are condemned as heretics throughout the books of *rijāl*. A look at the early works of *rijāl* such as that of al-Kashshī, indicate that a number of the prized and celebrated companions of the Imāms (Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam, Zurārah) were also cursed by the Imāms. These reports have tended to be rejected by later scholars, and many have found fault with the *rijāl* of al-Kashshī (as it is presented in an abridged form compiled by Shaykh Aṭ-Ṭūsī) because of the sometimes negative portraits it portrays of people like Zurārah.<sup>176</sup>

An example would be the following report in the *rijāl* of al-Kashshī. In one report cited in the *rijāl* of al-Kashshī, Ziyād ibn Abī Hilāl (a narrator who is considered to be reliable by Najāshī, Aṭ-Ṭūsī, and al-Barqī<sup>177</sup>) comes to Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq and tells the Imām about certain claims Zurārah was making with regard to when *ḥajj* becomes obligatory on a person. After Ziyād's explanation, the Imām is reported to have said: "I swear by God that he [Zurārah] has lied about me, by God he has lied about me! May Allāh curse Zurārah, May Allāh curse Zurārah, may Allāh curse Zurārah!"<sup>178</sup> The harsh words do not end there. Ziyād then seeks out Zurārah in Kūfah, and informs him of the Imām's displeasure without mentioning the curse. Zurārah then says: "He [Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq] explained this issue of capacity [to do *ḥajj*] without any knowledge, and this companion of yours [the Imām] has no insight (*baṣīrah*) into the words of the *rijāl*".<sup>179</sup> Modarressi references this particular narration but does not quote it; instead he writes:

Zurārah ibn A'yan, whose opinions on several theological topics including the question of *istitā'*, that is, whether man's capability precedes or coincides with the act...maintained, for instance, that he derives his own opinion on this latter topic from some remarks of Imām Ja'far al-Sadiq, although the Imām himself did not notice the collateral conclusion of his remarks because he was not thoroughly familiar with the nature of the theological debates going on at the time.<sup>180</sup>

A comparison between Modarressi's description and the actual *ḥadīth* that he cites (namely, the same *ḥadīth* of al-Kashshī cited above) presents a far different picture. Zurārah is seen to rebel openly against the Imām. Modarressi's presentation of the event seems to downplay the level of contempt that seemed to be held by both sides in the dispute, Zurārah's own insult of the Imām, and

<sup>176</sup> Sachedina *Just Ruler* 48.

<sup>177</sup> al-Khoi'i entry 4772.

<sup>178</sup> al-Kashshī 147.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid

<sup>180</sup> Modarressi *Crisis* 112.

the seeming absence of any faith on the part of Zurārah in the entire idea of Imāmah (i.e., that the Imām is the infallible proof of Allāh, the way that even modern orthodox Shī'ism understands Imāmah)<sup>181</sup>. All of this seems to be done in order to protect Zurārah, and the “moderate” camp that he represented, from any blame.

This is one of a number of damaging stories related about Zurārah<sup>182</sup> that have led some researchers to argue that the doctrine of a complete, authoritative Imāmah on all issues was not accepted by many of the prominent Imāmī Shī'ahs during the time of the Imāms.<sup>183</sup> al-Khū'ī reviews all of these *ḥadīths* in his own book on *rijāl*, and finds most of them to be weak in their *isnād*. The *ḥadīth* of Ibn Abī al-Hilāl cited above falls under this category. In the end he follows on the popular opinion that any such utterances by the Imām were based upon *taqīyyah*, where the Imām was attempting to safeguard Zurārah by making it seem that he was not a member of the Imām's entourage.<sup>184</sup> Amir-Moezzi makes the opposite argument concerning the condemnations of the *ghulāh*.<sup>185</sup>

Although there seems to be a pattern that those *ḥadīth* narrators who have presented a significant number of narrations are accused of being *ghulāh*, this does not by any means mean that the body of *ḥadīth* literature is entirely attributed to that group of people. Many of the most revered and “orthodox” disciples present *ḥadīths* in a similar vein. Perhaps the most striking *ḥadīth* in this regard was the “vision” *ḥadīth* of Abū Baṣīr, where the vision of the Imām was equated with the direct vision of God. Here, Abū Baṣīr (who narrated hundreds of *ḥadīths* from the Imāms, and is considered to be one of the most respected scholars of his time) comes to Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq to ask about one of the prominent theological questions of the day: whether or not Allāh will be visible to the believers in the hereafter. It was the contention of the 'Asha'ī school of theology, which basically became the orthodox Sunnī school of thought for Sunnīs,<sup>186</sup> that Allāh would appear to the believers as a bright moon in the sky on the Day of Judgment. This idea has become subject to great abuse in Sunnī-Shī'ah polemics, with Shī'ahs often holding Sunnīs to ridicule for the idea that Allāh can be

<sup>181</sup> Subḥānī *Doctrines* 110-112.

<sup>182</sup> Moussavi cites five separate occasions where Zurārah was cursed by Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq (49). Yet he attributes these disputes as being the natural result of their close relationship; but this seems hardly tenable. Kohlberg also discusses these incidents. Cf. his “Imām and Community” 35-37.

<sup>183</sup> Kohlman *Ibid.* 33.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.* 37, where explicit narrations are cited in this regard.

<sup>185</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 130.

<sup>186</sup> Corbin *History* 117-124.

seen in any way. But the text of this *ḥadīth* seems to contravene what has become the orthodox Shī'ah position of the eternal impossibility of ever seeing God. Corbin deals with this *ḥadīth* in his *Cyclical Time and Ismā'īlī Gnosis*, and the original *ḥadīth* also appears in Shaykh Aṣ-Ṣadūq's *Kitāb At-Tawḥīd* (the Book of Monotheism):

Ja'far Sadiq replied one day to a man [Abū Baṣīr] who asked him whether it was true on the day of the Resurrection [that] God would be visible to all: "Yes", said the Imām. "He is visible even before that day; he has been visible since the day when He asked: "Am I not your Lord?" The True Believers have seen him even in this world. Dost thou not see him?" And then Abū Baṣīr replied: "O my Lord, I see *thee*. Permit that by thy authority I go and announce it to the others". But the Imām said: "No, say nothing to anyone, for the people are stupid and ignorant, they will not understand; they will disavow you and hurl anathema at you".<sup>187</sup>

Abū Baṣīr, perhaps, was one of the first to attempt to wed the more rationalist and legitimist tradition of pre-Bāqir Ḥusaynid Shī'ism with the mysticism of Jābir ibn Yazīd, though the paucity of narrations like this from Abū Baṣīr may indicate that this particular narration is an isolated forgery, or an attempt by later Qumm school *ḥadīth* collectors to make such doctrines appear more mainstream. Given the paucity of external evidences concerning Abū Baṣīr's teachings (he is not assigned a "sect" of his own in al-'Asharī's heresiography, unlike Hishām). The high cosmic position of the Prophet and his family is presented, to a lesser degree, in a number of *ḥadīths* narrated by Zurārah as well. One group of these *ḥadīths* deals with the question of *tafwīd*, a thorny theological problem throughout Muslim history: to what degree does Allāh "share" His Absolute Power and Sovereignty with Creation? This seemed to be one of the fundamental questions of the Imām's ontological status. Some of *ḥadīths* attributed to Zurārah comment upon this theme as well, albeit with far less rhetorical emphasis:

Indeed, Allāh gave the Prophet the complete command over His Creation, in order to test Creation in their obedience. Then Allāh revealed the verse: "Whatever the Prophet gives you, then take it, and whatever he shuns you from, then avoid it".<sup>188</sup>

Again, this narration may merely have been attributed to Zurārah by later Qumm school scholars (the above narration appears in *al-Kāfī*) in order to make neo-*ghāfī* beliefs seem more

<sup>187</sup> Corbin *Cyclical* 129.

<sup>188</sup> *al-Kāfī* 1:266.

legitimate. Like Abū Baṣīr, narrations from Zurārah in this regard are quite sparse, raising the possibility of forgery.

Fights over the *ghulāh* influence become especially acute once Qumm is settled and becomes a center of Imāmī scholarship. Instructive in this regard is the case of Ḥusayn ibn Yazīd An-Nawāfīlī, who narrated a large number of *ḥadīths* from Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq. An-Najāshī writes that the people of Qumm said that he “became one of the *ghulāh* at the end of his life. Allāh knows best, though much of what we have narrated with regards to him would indicate this”.<sup>189</sup> Nonetheless, a number of Shī‘ah ‘*ulamā*’ have opted to defend him against this accusation and verify him as a reliable *ḥadīth* narrator. The defense that was presented by Ayatullāh Hādī Ma’rifah is interesting in this regard:

An-Nawāfīlī is one of the most learned of the Shī‘ah. He was originally from Kufī, and lived in Rayy, and it was there that he died. Because of his intense love (*wala*) of the Prophet’s family, the people of Qumm accused him of extremism (*ghuluww*). However, nothing that has come from him would indicate this...<sup>190</sup>

The important point is that the accusation seemed to stem from his, as al-Mari’fah puts it, “extreme love” for the Prophet’s family. The fact that this accusation is said to have come from the people of Qumm is also telling in this regard. During the pre-*ghaybah* period, it would seem that Qumm was a place where there was a great deal of dispute, and there seemed to be an early attempt by some ‘*ulamā*’ *ḥadīth* narrators to impose an orthodoxy that excluded the type of narrations discussed above. This is why, as discussed above, the appellation of “Qumm” school is a bit problematic; there is no doubt that many, if not most, of the scholarly residents of Qumm considered too much emphasis on the Imām’s supernatural status as being extreme.

In some cases, scholars whose own reliability and honesty was beyond question found themselves the victims of Qumm witch-hunts to root out so-called extremist *ḥadīths*.<sup>191</sup> Modarressi, in fact, argues that anybody who expressed any type of belief in the supernatural powers of the Imāms would be condemned by the people of Qumm as an apostate.<sup>192</sup> Modarressi cites perhaps the most extreme example of such witch-hunts: according to An-Najāshī and al-Ghazha’iri, the people of Qumm tried to *murder* the Shī‘ah scholar Abū Ja’far Muḥammad ibn Urama al-Qummī because of

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<sup>189</sup> al-Khū‘ī entry 3715.

<sup>190</sup> al-Ma’rifah 30.

<sup>191</sup> Momen 78-79.

<sup>192</sup> Modarressi *Crisis* 36.

some *ḥadīths* concerning the esoteric *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān that he had reported.<sup>193</sup> This is more bizarre given the fact that An-Najāshī cites him for having written a book called "*Kitāb Ar-Radd 'alā al-Ghulāh*" (the Book of *Refutation* of the *Ghulāh*)! This particular story should further bring to light the ambiguities in the term *ghulāh*. Even though some like to speak of those who believed in the Divinity or quasi-Divinity of the Imāms as "extremists" and those who do not as "moderates", this particular story would demonstrate that the "moderate" faction was far from moderate in the pursuit of their goals, resorting to slander, expulsion, and murder. It is interesting to note that the Fatimid jurist al-Qāḍī An-Nu'mān, who compiled a large number of narrations<sup>194</sup> from the fifth and sixth Imāms,<sup>195</sup> narrated from a large number of Imāmī scholars but refused to narrate on the authority of any scholars from Qumm.<sup>196</sup>

The story of the famous *ḥadīth* narrator Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Barqī (d. 280/893) is a telling example of the types of schisms that seemed to be developing at Qumm at the time.<sup>197</sup> He is the author of *Kitāb al-Maḥāsīn*, which is one of the earliest Imāmī Shī'ah *ḥadīth* collections and sheds some light on the types of beliefs and ideas that were current when the *ghaybah* of the Twelfth Imām began in the year 260/874.<sup>198</sup> This book is mainly a treatise on ethics (*akhlāq*) and etiquette (*adāb*), and so contains a large number of chapters dealing with various minutiae of Islamic law (use of perfumes, types of food which are recommended for eating, etc.). There are significant sections of the book that deal with the "luminous reality" of Imāmah and the true Shī'ahs of the Imām, and falls in line with the themes we have discussed in the previous chapters. An example would be the following, involving Jābir's son Sulaymān:

Imām Ar-Riḍā said to Sulaymān the son of Ja'far al-Ju'fi: O Sulaymān, indeed Allāh the Blessed and Exalted created the believer (*mu'min*) from Light,<sup>199</sup> and immersed them in His Mercy. He took a covenant from them that they would accept our *walāyah*. As such, the believer is the brother of every other believer, for they share the same father and mother. Their father is

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. 35; An-Najāshī 329.

<sup>194</sup> His magnum opus is the *Da'aim al-Islam*, which is almost entirely from the fifth and sixth Imāms.

<sup>195</sup> Madelung "Sources" 30. In this vein, there is some dispute as to whether or not he was himself an Imāmī Shī'ah who was merely "dissimulating" for the sake of his Fatimid Ismā'īlī patrons. Cf. Poonawala "A Reconsideration" 572-579.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid. 31.

<sup>197</sup> Kohlberg "Imām and Community" 39.

<sup>198</sup> Though it has been argued by some that this book was tampered with by other individuals. Cf. Bayhom-Daou *Imāmī* 31.

<sup>199</sup> The specific use of the phrase Light is of eminent importance here. One of the bases of "extremist" speculation about the Imāms in the early period is that they, along with their true followers, were born of the Light of God. Cf. Amir-Moezzi "Aspects de l'Imāmologie I" 196.

Light, and their mother is Mercy. So beware the glance of the believer, for he gazes with the Light of Allāh, the Light from which Allāh created him.<sup>200</sup>

It would seem, however, that many of these narrations were not to the liking of some of al-Barqī's contemporaries. In particular, he seems to have drawn the ire of another one of the major *ḥadīth* narrators, Aḥmad ibn 'Isā al-'Asharī. Al-'Asharī seems to have had quite a prominent place in Qumm; An-Najāshī says that he was the first person to settle there, and establish its burgeoning community of Shī'ites and Shī'ah *ḥadīth* narrators.<sup>201</sup> He is said to have been one of the companions of the Eighth Imām, 'Alī Ar-Riḍā, and that he used to be tasked with greeting the Imām and tending to his needs whenever he visited the town. It is said that al-'Asharī became more and more angry at the types of narrations that al-Barqī was presenting in his books, and felt that al-Barqī was narrating from weak, unreliable, and most likely extremist *ḥadīth* narrators. Other *ḥadīth* narrators seemed to feel the same way. The *rijāl* scholar al-Ghadhā'irī says that the people of Qumm spoke evil of him, and yet there was no problem with him per se; the problem was in those who narrated from him. This problem seemed to reach a head when al-'Asharī had al-Barqī expelled from Qumm, a rather shocking act for such an early period. There is no doubt, then, that even before the *ghaybah* there was a group of '*ulamā'*' who believed that they were the custodians of Shī'ī orthodoxy, and would come down hard against anyone they felt was leading the masses (*al-'awwām*) astray. Interestingly enough, it is also mentioned by al-Ghadhā'irī that al-'Asharī eventually brought al-Barqī back to Qumm. When al-Barqī died, al-'Asharī is said to have walked barefoot in the funeral procession, "in an act of repentance, seeking forgiveness for the false accusations that he had made against al-Barqī".<sup>202</sup> This incident has left its mark in the *rijāl* literature. Even though al-Barqī was one of the most important *ḥadīth* narrators, his books are treated with some degree of suspicion. An-Najāshī writes: "He was reliable in and of himself, even though most of his narrations rely upon weak narrators, or are without any *isnād*".<sup>203</sup> All of this indicates how ambiguous the idea of *ghuluww* was at the time. Scholars who were very important in the community, such as al-Barqī or An-Nawāfili, were being accused of *ghuluww* based on the Imāmological doctrines they were teaching. The space for Imāmological speculation was clearly very murky at the time; people who (judging by their legal compilations)

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<sup>200</sup> *Kitāb al-Mahasin* 1:131.

<sup>201</sup> al-Khū'ī entry 861.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.



reacted in horror to the antinomianism of many of the *ghulāh* were expressing doctrines that were sufficiently similar to those of Abū al-Khaṭṭab and al-Mufaḍḍal (who is specifically quoted throughout *al-Kāfi*) to warrant physical attack and exile.

Muḥammad ibn Sinān Az-Zāhirī is another person credited with a large number of *ḥadīths*, but about whom there is some dispute as to his authenticity, and who has been accused of both extremism and of “corrupted” narrations that are inspired by the *ghulāh*.<sup>204</sup> Modarressi places him at the lead of the *mufawwiḍah*, which seems to be his sobriquet for extremists.<sup>205</sup> One of the representatives of Imām al-‘Askarī, Faḍl ibn Shādhān An-Nishāpurī purportedly prohibited the ‘*ulamā*’ from narrating anything on his authority.<sup>206</sup> In spite of his voluminous presence in the early Imāmī Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* literature, he is nonetheless castigated as being extremely weak by scholars like An-Najāshī<sup>207</sup>, an opinion that Modarressi seems to follow. It is probably narrations like the following that caused trouble for him:

Muḥammad ibn Sinān narrates: I was with Abū Ja‘far II [Imām Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Jawad], and I mentioned to him the disputes that the Shī‘ah were in. He said: ‘O Abū Muḥammad! Indeed, Allāh the Blessed and Exalted does not cease being One in His Attention. He created Muḥammad and ‘Alī and Fātimah, and then waited a thousand eons; then He created everything else. He showed them the Creation, and enjoined upon Creation their obedience. He delegated (*fawwaḍa*) their affair to them. They make permissible whatever they will, and make impermissible whatever they will. And they do not will except as Allāh the Blessed and Exalted wills’.<sup>208</sup>

It is interesting to note that, in spite of the fact that he seems to have been at the lead of the “moderate” camp, he is credited with beliefs that were usually associated with the *ghulāh*, specifically the idea that Allāh has a physical body, and that he “lives” in the seventh heaven, seated (in a physical fashion) upon His Throne. For this, he is said to have *himself* been cursed by the Imāms.<sup>209</sup> Just as he does in the case of Zurārah, Modarressi makes sure to present the unflattering statements made about

<sup>204</sup> al-Khū‘ī entry 10938.

<sup>205</sup> Modarressi Ibid. 28.

<sup>206</sup> An-Najāshī 328.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> *al-Kāfi* 1:441.

<sup>209</sup> Cf. Al-Kashshī 539-540.

the *mufawwiḍah* and other “extremists”, while passing over in complete silence the condemnations that were heaped upon the “moderate” camp in many *ḥadīths* of the Imāms.<sup>210</sup>

The historical evidence, then, would seem to indicate a dispute between a number of factions during the time of the Imāms (contrary to Amir-Moezzi’s thesis, who seems to locate this battle as occurring *after* the Occultation) between those who believed in the Imāms as fundamentally Divine beings endowed with both omniscience and omnipotence and those who tended to view them in a more legalistic capacity (as scholars of *fiqh*, perhaps not even infallible<sup>211</sup>) seemed to intensify as time went on. Arjomand sees this crisis coming to a serious head during the time of the eleventh Imām, with the factions pronouncing anathema upon each other.<sup>212</sup>

Modarressi sees this battle as being primarily between those who believed in *tafwīḍ* (the delegation of Divine power to the Imāms), the *mufawwida*, and those who did not.<sup>213</sup> However, it would seem that even though *tafwīḍ* was a shibboleth for an enormous amount of debate and animosity during this period, the main debate was between those who viewed the Imāms as being, in some fashion or another, God manifest in human form (whether this “manifestation” be understood in a theophanic sense, as Sufis like Ibn ‘Arabī would) and a group of people who seemed barely willing to accept (and, in some cases, openly opposed to) the idea that the Imāms were infallible spiritual authorities. This latter group was pejoratively referred to as the *muqassirah*, those who “fall short” in praising the Imāms. The term seems to have mainly been a counter to the accusations of extremism lodged by that group.<sup>214</sup>

## Conclusions

We have seen that the most consistent theme amongst the *ghulāb* sects is the belief in the Divinity of the Imāms, though the details of that “Divinity” are only described in the most vague of

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<sup>210</sup> For example, he mentions the fact that Fadl ibn Shadhān prohibited the ‘*ulamā*’ from accepting anything from Muḥammad ibn Sinān, but fails to mention the *ḥadīth* where Fadl is himself cursed as a deviant and heretic. Modarressi *Crisis* 45 and Bayhom-Daou *Imāmī* 149-150.

<sup>211</sup> Some of the “moderate” ‘*ulamā*’ in Qumm were said to have held this belief; they did not believe that the Imāms had any Divine Knowledge at all, and that they were nothing more than learned *fuqahā*, using *Ijtihād* to derive Islamic laws. See Modarressi *Ibid.* 45. There is some evidence that even some of the most important disciples of the Imāms rejected this idea, and refused to accept the Imāms as comprehensive religious authorities. Cf. Kohlberg “Imām and Community” 35-36.

<sup>212</sup> Arjomand “Crisis” 501.

<sup>213</sup> Modarressi *Ibid.* 21-22.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.* 29.

terms. This much is obvious, and the pejorative use of the term *ghālī* almost always carries with it this connotation. Antinomians of other sects (such as *qalandAr*-style Sufis in the Indian sub-continent), while sharing many similarities with the *ghulāh* (antinomianism, adoration of ‘Alī, esotericism), are usually not given this label. But what’s more important from al-’Asharī’s survey is what does *not* seem to be ascribed to the *ghulāh*.

First, there is the absence of a committed association with particular Imāms. As we have seen, Abū al-Khaṭṭab and others seemed to have switched from Imām to Imām. ‘Alid legitimism seems to perform a very small part of the function. When looking at Nuṣayrī texts, there are no polemical discussions concerning ‘Alī’s succession. Famous incidents such as *ghadīr* are used, but in fact are interpreted in a way that makes them largely meaningless for polemical purposes. For example, one Nuṣayrī theologian argues that, rather than the Prophet saying “Whoever’s master (*mawlā*) I am, then ‘Alī is his master as well,” rather said: “Whoever’s slave (*mawlā*) I am, then ‘Alī is his meaning,” which is taken as a formulation of Nuṣayrī trinitarianism.<sup>215</sup> Obviously, one salient feature is that the classic Shī‘ī argument about the meaning of the ambiguous word *mawlā* is here favoured on the side of the Sunni interpretation, and the whole *ḥadīth* is recast in a way that makes the use of *mawlā* as slave intelligible. Proving ‘Alī’s caliphate is obviously not going to be of interest in terms of Nuṣayrī trinitarianism; ‘Alī has a status above that of the Prophet, and the Prophet is merely the “Name” that points towards him. The concern with his succession is relatively moot, and the entire relationship between the Prophet and ‘Alī is cast in totally different terms.

If we look back at the heresiographical literature, the ambiguities in terms of which line of Imāms particular *ghulāh* followed only becomes confusing if we assume that they were ‘Alid legitimists first and foremost. Comparing the doctrines of al-Khaṣṣbī (who was contemporary to al-’Asharī) with the non-committal attitude of most *ghulāh* towards succession issues would indicate that the proto-Imāmological used the ‘Alid legitimist ideology as a way of projecting their religious speculations on specific, living figures. As many historians have argued, this switch seems to have begun after the battle of Karbalā and the martyrdom of Imām Ḥusayn; but the absence of *ghulāh*-like theological doctrines being attributed to Imām ‘Alī Zayn al-’Abidīn (Ḥusayn’s successor) would seem to indicate that this relationship was still in its genesis during the time of the second *fitnah*. It is of

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<sup>215</sup> Bar-Asher and Kofsky 59.

great relevance that the gnostic tract *Umm al-Kitāb* is attributed to al-Bāqir, and that no such “esoteric revelations” are attributed to any of the earlier Imāms until relatively late.

Secondly, there is no elaboration of a negative theology. This is very different from the way that Imāmological ideas are argued for by Qumm scholars, as we will discuss. Works like *al-Kāfī* begin with a whole series of *ḥadīths* that argue against having any positive knowledge of God’s Essence; the Imām is brought in in subsequent chapters as a figure who “reveals God” to creation. It is then that the Qumm school scholars begin to ascribe attributes to the Imāms that are very similar to many of the *ghulāh*: omniscience, magical power, omnipotence, metemphosis, immortality, and more. The Imām is the Qummī answer to the question: “How is God to be known?” Yet there is no evidence from any of the heresiographical sources or the *ghulāh* sources to argue for a *via negative* in any systematic way. It is, perhaps, alluded to in some of the treatises of al-Khaṣībī, but there is none of the dialectical reasoning one finds for it in the Qummī books of *ḥadīth*. While the Qummī *ḥadīths* seem to be struggling with a well-known theological issue prevalent at the time, there is no indication that the *ghulāh* had any interest in that issue. The fact that most of them are usually described as being commoners<sup>216</sup> probably has much to do with it; before al-Khaṣībī, there is no indication that *ghulūww* speculation was of any interest to more literate theologians.

Imāmī Shī’ism was still an incredibly amorphous entity at the time of al-Bāqir. The main doctrine of hereditary Imāmah does not begin to be formed until the time of Muḥammad al-Bāqir at the earliest, though most historians usually attribute the full-development of the doctrine of *naṣṣ* to Ja’far aṣ-Ṣādiq.<sup>217</sup> While ‘Alid legitimism was attempting to sort itself, both in laying down basic doctrines of Imāmah as well as identifying who the legitimate successors were, *ghulāh* speculation was developing in a parallel way. Most of the early *ghulāh* seemed to have little concern with the question of succession, and would switch from Imām to Imām as they felt appropriate, or even claim Imāmah for themselves. Yet, with the death of most of the Ḥanafid movements by the time of Ja’far aṣ-Ṣādiq, these groups had gradually rallied around the Ḥusaynid line of Imāms (though would be ruptured once again with the death of Ja’far, producing the most important split in Shī’ī history). It was during the period of Ja’far aṣ-Ṣādiq, where one of the most important *ghulāh* (Abū al-Khaṭṭāb) was given a position of official importance in the Imāmī community, that these doctrines start to

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<sup>216</sup> Buckley 313-314

<sup>217</sup> Momen 39.

coalesce in a substantial way. This union was not without its troubles, and the battle between the *ghulāh* and Imāmīs who accepted many of their Imāmological doctrines without accepting their incarnationism or antinomianism, and a wide group of Imāmīs who viewed the Imām as being a mortal man with only the added quality of infallibility, rages into the time of the Imām ‘Alī Ar-Riḍā, and continues well into the Buyid period. The works of Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq and his students seems to have been an attempt at a grand compromise, taking what was useful from the *ghulāh* who had migrated from the Ḥanafid camp to the Ḥusaynid camp, and dispensing with the rest.

Rather than Shi’ism shifting from a totally esoteric and *ghālī* movement into a highly rationalized, ‘Alid legitimist version of Mu’tazilite thought, as Amir-Moezzi or Momen argue, a number of divergent strands are brought under one umbrella. The *ghulāh*, a separate movement from the Ḥusaynid party, began to integrate with the Ḥusaynid party during the time of Muḥammad al-Bāqir, in the wake of Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah’s defection. Their doctrines, while quite alien, seemed to fulfil a number of theological gaps: they provided answers as to what kind of being the Imām was, and specifically became useful in answering the nascent Mu’tazilah on the question of Divine attributes: those attributes could now be applied to a *person*, who simultaneously preserves the Law (through his infallibility) and allows the believer to experience God on a human level (through the Imām’s unique ontological position). Doctrines that clearly violated the spirit of *tawḥīd* (such as *ḥulūl*, incarnationism) were, of course, rejected, as were those who were associated with such doctrines, such as Abū al-Khaṭṭāb. Antinomianism was of course rejected as well, as was any concept of esotericism. But the broad Imāmological doctrines of the Imām as a demiurge, as the phase of God, are still preserved. One reason for this, as will become clear in our discussion of negative theology in the following chapter, is that these doctrines were actually easily defensible from a rationalist standpoint, and were just another way of answering the classic theological question of the relationship between God’s attributes and God’s essence. They are sufficiently *orthodox* that they could be brought into the Imāmī fold without trouble.

There can be no doubt that the term “extremist” (in any language) is highly loaded and inherently derogatory. The term has seen so much currency in the period before and after the Occultation that it cannot be ignored. The body of “extremist” doctrines is highly amorphous, but one theme is continuous and recurrent amongst all groups that would be dubbed *ghulāh*: the idea that, in some way or another, the Imām is a Divine figure. At the minimum, he is cast as a kind of demiurge,

ruling over all Creation and (in most cases) responsible for its very existence. This type of theology *cum* Imāmology places the importance of a specific *person* (who is, more than anything else, a *theophanic* figure) above religious institutions like the revealed Book or the Sacred Law (the *shari'ah*). From the standpoint of the Qumm school scholars we have discussed, extremism in the area of Imāmology seems to be a matter of degree, rather than qualitative difference. While many in the Imāmī community regarded any kind of quasi-extremist Imāmology with horror, the Qumm school scholars accepted it and made it an integral part of their theological system, and use these ideas of Imāmah to resolve specific theological questions. The way this was done will be discussed in the third chapter.

## The Early Imāmī Shī'ī *Ḥadīth* Literature

The early Imāmī *ḥadīth* literature is a difficult group of works to classify. Most of them are *ḥadīth* works that focus extensively on Imāmological doctrines, and it is those texts that we will be looking at in detail. It is fairly certain that in the case of al-Kulaynī, he stood by what he presented in his work as authoritative, owing to his statement in the introduction to *al-Kāfī*.

...You have also said that you want a book which is sufficient [*kāfī*, a derivative of the title of the book] which suffices for all the sciences of the knowledge of religion, and which is sufficient for the student, and which the one seeking guidance may make recourse to, and which anybody can use who desires knowledge of religion and action on the basis of that knowledge, itself based upon *correct reports* (*āthār ṣaḥīḥah*) from the two truthful ones [*aṣ-ṣādiqayn*, the fifth and sixth Imāms] and the well-known practices (*As-sunan al-qā'imah*) which derive from them.<sup>218</sup>

A similar claim is made in the beginning of the *Tafsīr* of al-Qummī. In terms of the other works, it is not entirely clear whether the authors consider every *ḥadīth* they presented as “authentic” or, at least, conveying true doctrine. There are contradictions throughout these works, especially the compendiums of Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq. Therefore, we cannot speak of a “theology of the Qumm school” in an absolute way, but only of an Imāmological tendency that is represented by these works. Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq, in particular, seems to have struggled to interpret many of the narrations he presented within the paradigm of his more moderate views on Imāmah. It is this quasi-extremist *tendency* that we will be focusing on. The areas of law and other doctrine found in these books, which are filled with even greater contradictions than the Imāmological work, will not be a focus of this research.

The Qumm school cannot be viewed as a “camp” in and of itself. As we have seen from our discussion of *rijāl*, Qumm itself was rife with religious and theological controversy. They merely pass on a tendency that we wish to explore, rather than constituting a fully defined sect within Shi'ism. Nonetheless, there are enough scholars who chose to pass on that tradition that the Qumm school appellation still has some meaning. We will explore some of these scholars works below.

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<sup>218</sup> *al-Kāfī* 1:8.

1) *Baṣā'ir ad-Darajāt*

One of the earliest works that we have in this period is the *Baṣā'ir ad-Darajāt fī 'ulūm āl Muḥammad mā Khaṣṣahum Allāh bihī*, or *Baṣā'ir ad-Darajāt* for short. Amir-Moezzi argues that this is the most ancient treatise on esoteric Imāmology,<sup>219</sup> though the fact that it was clearly compiled for a wide audience would argue against it being considered “esoteric” in any way. This is the work of Ash-Shaykh Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn al-Farrūkh aṣ-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, who died in the year 290/902-903, thirty-five years after the birth of the Twelfth Imām. He is said to have been a companion of the tenth and eleventh Shī'ah Imāms,<sup>220</sup> and so his intellectual career spans a quite early period.<sup>221</sup> It was also a very important period, for this was the onset of the Twelfth Imām's Occultation, which began in the year 260 (when the Imām was five years old) with the death of his father the Eleventh Imām Ḥasan al-'Askari. During this period, contemporary Shī'ah orthodoxy holds that the Imām communicated to the people through a series of representatives, before the onset of the “Great Occultation” in the year 329 where he was completely separated from the faithful. As such, aṣ-Ṣaffār al-Qummī compiled this work while the office of Imāmah was still functioning in a manifest way, and before the community was completely severed from contact with their Imām. The earliness of this work is perhaps best attested to by the almost total absence of any attempt to fix the number of Imāms at Twelve,<sup>222</sup> indicating that the text was compiled before the complete forming of the “Imāmī” school of Shī'ism after the onset of the Occultation.<sup>223</sup>

*Baṣā'ir ad-Darajāt* mainly deals with issues of doctrine, as opposed to legal issues (*fiqh*),<sup>224</sup> as such it is eminently important in attempting to unearth the early belief of the Imāmīte community.

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<sup>219</sup> And probably the second most ancient *ḥadīth* work that is extant today, next to the *Kitāb al-Maḥasin* of al-Barqī. The latter work, however, deals primarily with ethics and law, and so it will not be of major concern to us here. Cf. Amir-Moezzi “Aṣ-Ṣaffār al-Qummī” 222

<sup>220</sup> Ibid; Ibn Dawūd al-Hillī 305.

<sup>221</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 20.

<sup>222</sup> Bayhom-Daou *Imāmī* 35; Amir-Moezzi “Aṣ-Ṣaffār al-Qummī” 236.

<sup>223</sup> Amir-Moezzi sees this as being largely due to the obligation of “protecting the secret” of the number of Imāms before the Occultation. Ibid., as well as *Divine Guide* 100-104. Nonetheless, we do find references to Twelve Imāms within the extant copies of the “400 sources” which serve as the most ancient recording of Shī'ī narrations. In one “source” we read that the Prophet says “From my progeny there will be eleven Noble Masters, spoken to by angels and understanding. The last of them will be the Resurrector of Truth, who will fill the Earth with justice as it was once filled with oppression”. (Muṣṭafawī 15).

<sup>224</sup> Though he is attributed with a large number of works in this area as well Cf. Amir-Moezzi “Aṣ-Ṣaffār al-Qummī” 224-225.



Throughout this book, we find narrations of an eminently “*ghulāḥ*” nature: whole chapters are devoted to the Imāms as the “Face of God”, “the Hand of God”, “the Heart of God”, and other appellations where Divinity is specifically predicated on the figure of the Imāms. The doctrine of *tafwīd* is also amply dealt with. There are also numerous narrations concerning *tahrīf* (change in the Qur’ān). In spite of the fact that such ideas cause great anxiety amongst contemporary Shī’ah ‘*ulamā*’, aṣ-Ṣaffār al-Qummī is not regarded as an unreliable scholar by the Shī’ah. The only exception to this occurs in the *rijāl* work of Ibn al-Ghadhā’irī<sup>225</sup> it is stated that he was accused of being one of the *ghulāḥ* by some of the people of Qumm, though he mentions no evidence for this position, and seems to dismiss it himself by adding the famous lapidary of “God knows best”.<sup>226</sup> This accusation does not seem to have been taken seriously by later ‘*ulamā*’; as will be discussed, the “people of Qumm” were violently fanatical and arbitrary in their use of the term *ghulāḥ*, going so far as to try to murder *ḥadīth* narrators who narrated anything of an esoteric (*bāṭinī*) nature, so their accusations seem to be readily dismissed by Shī’ah scholars themselves. The authoritative and early work on *rijāl* of Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī An-Najāshī (d. 450) writes about aṣ-Ṣaffār al-Qummī:

He is one of the most important scholars from our companions in Qumm. He is reliable (*thiqah*) and of gloriously high status (*‘azīm al-qadr*), of superior status with little worthy of rejection in his narrations.<sup>227</sup>

As such, *Baṣā’ir ad-Darajāt* can be classified as an authoritative work within the Imāmī milieu,<sup>228</sup> and it is also one of the earliest (if not the earliest) compilations of *ḥadīth* that is still extant. Its author does not seem to be associated in any way with “deviant” sects, and so the presence of the large number of *ghulāḥ* narrations within his work is strong evidence of the prevalence of “extremist” beliefs in the early period. In fact, it is not so much that this book includes narrations where the semi-Divinity of the Imāms is established, but that it seems to be almost solely about this subject and the doctrines that are subsidiary to it.

## 2) The *Tafsīr* of ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī

<sup>225</sup> On him, see Arioli 57-58.

<sup>226</sup> al-Ghadhā’irī 2:180.

<sup>227</sup> An-Najāshī 354.

<sup>228</sup> Though some of his students do seem to have been uncomfortable with some of the more “extreme” narrations in *Baṣā’ir* itself. Cf. Amir-Moezzi “Aṣ-Ṣaffār al-Qummī” 221.

The *Tafsīr al-Qummī* is a collection of narrations concerning the interpretation of the Qur'ān. This is a very early work, and the commentary is replete with references to an Imāmology that includes doctrines of *tafwīd* as well as *tahrīf* in the Qur'ān. It covers many doctrinal as well as Imāmological topics. Corruption of the 'Uthmānic text is also explicitly referred to both in the narrations presented by the author, as well as the author's own introduction to the work.<sup>229</sup> One of the most important aspects of this work, however, is the fact that the author is fairly explicit that *every* narrator he includes in the work is reliable.<sup>230</sup> As such, it is one of the few Shī'ah *ḥadīth* works where the author makes the specific claim that everything in his book is reliable and sound. As for the author himself, 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. 307/919), he is considered to be one of the greatest and most authoritative narrators. He himself appears in hundreds of chains of narrations found in other books. An-Najāshī praises him as highly reliable and sound in his beliefs.<sup>231</sup>

### 3) The *Tafsīr* of Muḥammad ibn Mas'ūd al-'Ayyāshī

The *Tafsīr* of Muḥammad ibn Mas'ūd al-'Ayyāshī (d. 320/931) is similar in content and style to the *Tafsīr* of al-Qummī. This work is filled with explicit acknowledgments of *tahrīf* in the 'Uthmānic vulgate.<sup>232</sup> Interestingly enough, the author had been a well-known *Sunnī* scholar before he converted to Shi'ism.<sup>233</sup> Even though his *Tafsīr* contains many eminently "extremist" narrations, 'Ayyāshī was never accused of being one of the *ghulāh*. He is attributed with a very large number of works, and aṭ-Ṭūsī, one of the pillars of post-Buyid orthodoxy,<sup>234</sup> describes him as being of glorious status and stature.<sup>235</sup>

<sup>229</sup> Bar-Asher "Deux Traditions" 292.

<sup>230</sup> Cf. Al-Khū'ī entry 12614.

<sup>231</sup> An-Najāshī 260.

<sup>232</sup> Bar-Asher Ibid. 293.

<sup>233</sup> Kohlberg "Imāmīte Attitude" 215.

<sup>234</sup> Momen 88.

<sup>235</sup> Aṭ-Ṭūsī *al-Fihrist* 136.

*al-Kāfī* is perhaps the most important of all Shī'ah *ḥadīth* works, authored by Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī Ar-Rāzī (d. 328/939). Of all the Imāmī Shī'ah scholars of *ḥadīth*, al-Kulaynī is the most famous and the most authoritative, and no one amongst the Imāmī scholars has ever questioned his veracity. The historical evidence would indicate that *al-Kāfī* was regarded as having nearly canonical status, like the *ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī amongst Sunnīs. It is considered to be one of the four "canonical books" of Imāmī Shī'ism (*al-kutub al-'arba'h*), along with aṣ-Ṣadūq's *Man Lā Yaḥduruhu al-Faqīh* and Aṭ-Ṭūsī's *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* and *al-Istibṣār*. Its title is instructive about the intentions of the author: it is said that al-Kulaynī presented this book to one of the representatives of the Twelfth Imām during the period of the Short Occultation. On reviewing it, the Imām himself is said to have said that the book would suffice (*kāfī*) for the religious needs of the Shī'ah.<sup>236</sup> The fact that the book was intended for the whole community proves that it was not intended as an esoteric text in anyway; but it certainly contains a great deal of primitive speculation about the Imām. The book encompasses approximately 16,000 *ḥadīths*, covering all possible topics in Shī'ism. This is indicative of the belief-system that underlies this book, namely that all knowledge must be derived from the Imāms,<sup>237</sup> with little room for speculative or dialectical theology. The first part of the book, the *Uṣūl* deals mainly with theological issues. The most important part of that section is the *Kitāb al-Ḥujjah* (the book of the "Proof", one of the titles of the Imāms), which deals entirely with Imāmology. It is here that we read in detail how the Imāms are the Face of God, the supreme sign of God, the ones to whom God has delegated His Power over Creation, and so forth. This section is quite large, with hundreds of narrations. The second section, the *Furū'*, deals mainly with legal issues and will not be of major concern to us here. The third section, the *Rawḍa*, deals with an amalgamation of different subjects related to spirituality and other issues. It is in this section that we find the largest number of narrations dealing with *tahriḥ*.

In spite of the early popularity of the book, its authority was gradually called into question.<sup>238</sup> As Newman has argued, this text must be read alongside of the growing prominence of

<sup>236</sup> Newman *Formative* 99.

<sup>237</sup> Bayhom-Daou *Imāmī* 183.

<sup>238</sup> Momen 338, footnote 4.

the Mu'tazilah in Baghdād at the time. Reason is cast as a synonym for Imāmate,<sup>239</sup> much closer to the philosopher's understanding of intellect. Intellect as a kind of *nous*, rather than the *ratio* of the Mu'tazilah, is given prime emphasis. This was commensurate with the application of '*ilm al-ḥadīth*' and '*ilm Ar-rijāl*' in the Shī'ah world, sciences that were primarily developed by Sunnī scholars and only later adapted by the Shī'ah.<sup>240</sup> Though it may have once enjoyed the kind of canonical authority that al-Bukhārī's compilation had among Sunnī scholars, there is no sense amongst most contemporary Shī'ah '*ulamā'*' that "everything" in it is *ṣaḥīḥ*, and certainly by the standards of '*ilm al-ḥadīth*' the majority of narrations in it suffer from various problems in terms of *isnād*.

##### 5) *Kitāb al-Ghaybah* of An-Nu'mānī

The author of this work, Abū 'Abdillāh Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Ja'far An-Nu'mānī, died in either the year 345 or 360. He was a disciple and student of al-Kulaynī and is the author of one of the first *ḥadīth* collections concerning the Occultation of the Twelfth Imām.<sup>241</sup> *al-Kāfī* does include narrations in this regard, and many of these re-appear within An-Nu'mānī's work; but there are many other chains of narrations that trace back to other books, now lost. Another important area of difference is that the majority of al-Kulaynī's *isnāds* are traced back to Qummī sources, whereas An-Nu'mān's go back to sources outside of the city.<sup>242</sup> Within this work, we do not find the almost ecstatic Imāmology of *al-Kāfī*, though the cosmic necessity of the Imām's continued existence (even in Occultation) is affirmed in a number of chapters. These narrations are important for our study because they help to establish the idea that the Imām is "more than human," and show the influence of an earlier set of beliefs that emphasized a mystical (as opposed to rational) view on Imāmology. In these narrations, the existence of the universe is dependent on the existence of the Imām *qua* demiurge. Concerning the author, there is no dispute as to his soundness or reliability. An-Najāshī writes of him: "He is the *shaykh* of our companions, of glorious status, of noble standing, and correct in his beliefs, with many narrations".<sup>243</sup>

<sup>239</sup> Newman *Formative* 101.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid. 184-185.

<sup>241</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 20.

<sup>242</sup> Newman "Between Qumm and the West" 100.

<sup>243</sup> An-Najāshī 383.

## 6) The works of Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq

Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq Ibn Bābawayh Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn 'Alī was one of the most important prolific *ḥadīth* compilers, and one of the most important Shī'ah '*ulamā'*' in history. His father, 'Alī ibn Bābawayh, was also a *ḥadīth* narrator of some stature. He died in the year 381. His works mark an important bridge between an early Shī'ism that revolves around a mystical and Divine Imāmology and the rationalized theology that his student, Shaykh al-Mufīd (and his student, al-Murtaḍā) would introduce. There has never been any question as to his authority, and he is perhaps second only to al-Kulaynī in importance. He is credited, at highest count, with almost two hundred works,<sup>244</sup> and he is the author of one of the four "canonical books" (*al-kutub al-'arba'*) of Imāmī Shī'ism, *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruh al-Faqīh*. This book mainly concerns matters of law, rather than doctrine, and so it will not be of significant concern to us in this research. The most significant for our study will be his work *At-Tawḥīd*, dealing primarily with theology. Throughout this work, the Imām is posited as the supreme threshold between God and Creation, and a theme that no one knows God except through knowledge of the Imām forms the basic core of belief. Rational theology (in the form of '*ilm al-kalām*') is also heavily attacked in this book. Another important work of his is '*Ilal Ash-sharā'i'*', which seeks to explain the causes of the universe, the natural order, the names given to various things, and the reasons underlying Islamic legal injunctions. The book *Ma'āni al-Akhbār* also contains important narrations concerning Imāmology; importantly enough, it mainly consists of narrations that comment on other, famous narrations. There is also aṣ-Ṣadūq's *al-'Amālī*, a collection of sessions where he recited various narrations (which he had memorized) to an audience of his students.

### Dating of the Texts

Because of the complexities that are always involved in any study of the *ḥadīth* literature, we cannot determine at all what the Imāms "actually said"; but we can use these sources to determine the major themes of primitive, early Shi'ism. In terms of dating these works, we have not found anybody who has offered evidence that these works were doctored or changed at a later date, and that they are

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<sup>244</sup> Amir-Moezzi Ibid. 21.

not genuine compositions of the authors they are attributed to. In any case, if any editing was done to these works, it could only have occurred shortly after the time of these authors themselves, since the “turn” in Buyid-era Shī‘ism was only about a century after these works are said to have been compiled. After this turn, it is unlikely that later Shī‘ah scholars would have in any way added “extremist” narrations to these books, since they were so opposed to such doctrines. As far as the *ghulāh* themselves, the Buyid period was the time where the *ghulāh* had started to develop a separate sense of identity, where Nuṣayrī (or at least proto-Nuṣayrī) thinkers like al-Khaṣībī (d. 346/957 or 358/968) were penning theological tracts separate from the Imāmī mainstream. There is not really any question of them forging the Qummī texts during this time; many people (like al-Mughīrah, discussed below) who were classed as *ghulāh* by later scholars of *rijāl* are quoted extensively in Qumm scholar works. The sharp distinction between the orthodox and the extremists seems still to be somewhat vague while the Qumm scholars were composing their works.

The phrase “primitive” Shī‘tes, used by Amir-Moezzi and others, is perhaps instructive here. Amir-Moezzi notes that the early corpus of “extremist” sermons do not exhibit any kind of advanced philosophical or theological language,<sup>245</sup> the kind of language that would become current in later periods (especially after Ibn ‘Arabī). They are of an eminently “primitive” nature, designed more for shock factor,<sup>246</sup> rather than the creation of a more sophisticated theology.<sup>247</sup>

As far as the authorship of these narrations is concerned, it is impossible to tell who or when with any specifics. But the presence of such ideas amongst early Imāmīs seems indisputable if we combine our analysis of these narrations with the ideas attributed to “extremists” in early heresiographical works, like that of An-Nawbakhtī.<sup>248</sup> As has been pointed out by al-Qadi and Madelung, even though An-Nawbakhtī himself did not die until the fourth-century *hijrī*, his source seems to be a heresiographic tract written by none other than Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam, one of the singularly most prominent disciples of the sixth Imām.<sup>249</sup> If this is the case, and if An-Nawbakhtī’s

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid. 198.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid. 194.

<sup>247</sup> As opposed to some later sermons. Compare this sermon to that of the sermon on “the macrocosm and microcosm” in *Nahj al-Asrār* 38-39.

<sup>248</sup> Cf. chapter one.

<sup>249</sup> al-Qāḍī 15-16. Madelung felt that An-Nawbakhtī made no changes at all from this earlier manuscript, but Bayhom-Daou has provided strong evidence of some alteration. However, these alterations do not seem to have occurred with regards to hostile comments about the extremist faction. Rather, he seems to have edited Hishām’s critical comments on the belief in Occultation as

source was authentic, then his work on *firaq* can be taken as a good approximation of the wide-differences between different Imāmī thinkers in the second century *hijrī*. This is one advantage that any study of early Shī'ism has over early Islam. Although there is precious little in the way of non-Muslim sources for studying the time of the Prophet himself,<sup>250</sup> there is a great deal of "external" literature concerning early Shī'ism. A combination of this external, heresiographical literature and the internal *ḥadīth* literature can give us a fairly clear picture of what beliefs were current amongst early Imāmī Shī'ites, as well as the *ghulāh*.

Another factor that is important in determining the ancientness of the theological speculations are the specific ways in which Shī'ī narrations were compiled, and their chronological proximity to the individuals whose statements they purport to record (i.e., the Imāms). The Sunnī literature is, as would be expected, mainly a compilation of narrations from the *Prophet*, but the Shī'ah literature is almost entirely made up of statements from the *Imāms*,<sup>251</sup> who came *after the Prophet*. As such, the chronological gap between the Shī'ah *ḥadīth* and the individuals that it claims to represent is far less than that of the Sunnī literature. In point of fact, very few Shī'ah narrations are attributed directly to the Prophet himself. The Imām, as the Prophet's Divinely Appointed successor, is seen to speak for the Prophet; and theologically there is no difference between the statements of the Imāms and that of the Prophet.<sup>252</sup> both are infallible sources of doctrine and revelation.<sup>253</sup> Given this theological position, there was no reason for the Shī'ah to try and trace narrations directly to the Prophet himself, via the mass of contradictory reports attributed to his "companions". The words of their Imāms were sufficient and no other evidences were needed.

Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq said: "Whatever questions we answer from you is from the Prophet of Allāh, and we have no right to say: 'This is my opinion (*ra'y*) in any matter'".<sup>254</sup>

The only time that one of the Prophet's companions (other than 'Alī of course) is cited as an authority for the Prophet is a body of narrations attributed to Jābir ibn 'Abdillāh al-Anṣārī, but these

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an extremist position, something that given the Nawbakhtī family's ascending position during the Occultation, would have to be legitimated as part of Shī'ī orthodoxy.

<sup>250</sup> Peters 292.

<sup>251</sup> Cf. Lalani 103.

<sup>252</sup> Bayhom-Daou *Imāmī* 184-185.

<sup>253</sup> Kohlberg "Unusual" 142.

<sup>254</sup> *al-Kāfī* 1:58.

narrations go through the medium of the fifth Imām.<sup>255</sup> Since the Shī‘ah *ḥadīth* literature deals with a later group of people (the Imāms), the historical gap between the authors of the treatises discussed above and the individuals that the literature is attributed to is smaller. For example, aṣ-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, and al-Kulaynī were all alive before the onset of the Twelfth Imām’s Occultation, and so were contemporary to the later Imāms. As such, this body of *ḥadīth* literature is chronologically closer to the revelatory source than the Sunnī literature, because (for Imāmī Shī‘ites) direct Divine guidance continued for a longer period than the Sunnīs, and so there is an organic connection between these texts and the earlier periods of Shī‘ah theological speculation

Still, the extant Shī‘ah books of *ḥadīth* are not entirely contemporaneous with the specific Imāms that most narrations are attributed to. The majority of Shī‘ī narrations are attributed to the fifth Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 114/733), the sixth Imām Ja‘far aṣ-Ṣādiq d. (148/765), and the eighth Imām ‘Alī Ar-Riḍā (d. 203/818).<sup>256</sup> This was most likely due to the political situation of the time. These Imāms suffered from less persecution than the other Imāms of this period, and so were far freer to teach their disciples.<sup>257</sup> Hence, with the books that we are dealing with, there is sometimes a gap of one-half to two centuries between many of the *ḥadīths* recorded and the specific Imām to whom they are attributed. Bayham-Daou, however, argues that the majority of narrations are attributed to the fifth and sixth Imāms because of the higher popularity that they had, meaning that forged narrations would have had more “weight” if they were traced back to these Imāms.<sup>258</sup> The chronological gap may also help to support this thesis.

However, there are important mitigating factors that one should make note of in dealing with this body of literature, and that is the unique nature of the chains of narration (*isnād*) given in Shī‘ah *ḥadīth* books. These chains of narration seem, in large part, to be citations of previous narrators’ books, as well as books written by the Imāms’ companions *themselves*, rather than purely oral statements as to what the Imāms said and did. All of the major Shī‘ah *ḥadīth* narrators in the “first generation” of the various chains of narration given are credited with an enormous number of *ḥadīth* books on various subjects, from which later collections seem to have been compiled.

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<sup>255</sup> Kohlberg “Unusual” 144-146.

<sup>256</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 158, footnote 3.

<sup>257</sup> Momen 37-45.

<sup>258</sup> Bayhom-Daou “Ghulāh” 52.



Unfortunately, almost none of these collections exist today, so it is not possible (except in some rare exceptions) to determine whether or not a particular narration was passed down orally or in the form of now non-extant manuscripts (or both). It seems that the large majority of narrations ultimately refer to *written* sources, which is an important factor in dealing with the organic connection between the extant literature we have and the more ancient period, since it both reduces the probability of transmission error<sup>259</sup> and makes it more likely that a forger would have been caught (since at the time, others could have easily checked the references given). Of course, the possibility of forgery remains under all circumstances. In this regard, it is very important to remember that, when studying the Shī'ah *ḥadīth* literature, we are dealing with a set of narrations that go back to a very different time period than that of the Sunnī literature. Literacy was much more common, and the narrators that we are dealing with all seem to be literate individuals. Many narrations in the Shī'ah literature are also reproductions of *letters* sent by the Imāms to their followers, and so the narrator is not reporting what the Imām said to him but what had been written to him. The point is that literacy was far more common in this age, and this increases the probability that a large number of narrations were passed down from original textual sources rather than purely oral recitations.

The specific instruction for the companions of the Imāms to *write* down what they had heard also occurs throughout the early *ḥadīth* literature,<sup>260</sup> further increasing the probability that the narrations that are present in the extant Shī'ah *ḥadīth* works are derived from textual sources. A number of works are said to have been written on the basis of a specific and direct instruction from the Imāms, and these are the 400 "sources" (*uṣūl*): these provide the oral source of which many later "citation" narrations seem to be derived.<sup>261</sup> These are the actual written documents, compiled mostly by companions of the sixth Imām Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq,<sup>262</sup> of the Imāms' saying as heard *directly* by one of the narrators, either without intermediary, or one intermediary at the most.<sup>263</sup> According to the *ḥadīth* literature itself, these documents seem to have been written on the orders of the Imām Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq

<sup>259</sup> Though by no means absolutely excluding it. All kinds of copying mistakes can be found in more modern Shī'ah *ḥadīth* books; nonetheless, writing things down is obviously less fallible than rote memorization of *ḥadīth*.

<sup>260</sup> Cf. Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 27.

<sup>261</sup> Moussavi 21; Lalani 14-15.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid. 26; al-Fadli 77-79.

<sup>263</sup> Nonetheless, this by no means proves that they are universally accepted by Shī'ah jurists; the same standards of *rijāl*-based criticism are applied. Some are even said to have been forged. Cf. Kohlberg "al-Uṣul" 141. As such, though we will make reference to these works, we will have to be tentative with them, and do our best to corroborate what is written in them with the other extant *ḥadīth* collections.

himself.<sup>264</sup> As to the specific number of 400, this seems mainly based on a famous statement of Shaykh al-Mufīd, the student of Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq, who describes 400 such “sources” written by Shī‘ah scholars from the time of the first Imām ‘Alī to the eleventh Imām al-‘Askarī.<sup>265</sup> Other Shī‘ah scholars have disputed this number, saying that the number was much higher. The sixth-century scholar Ibn Shahrāshūb al-Māzandarānī reckons them at 700, and some as many as 4,000.<sup>266</sup> Sixteen of these sources have been published in Iran by Ḥasan Muṣṭafawī. The ambiguities in number are probably due to confusion about whether or not certain books can be described as “sources”; there is a great ambiguity in the term. The most distinctive feature of these works was the absence of any systematic order. They are written as pure dictations, and the narrations are more often than not completely unrelated to each other.<sup>267</sup>

Those who attribute higher numbers of “sources” are probably being less rigorous in distinguishing the books of *ḥadīth* attributed to the direct disciples of the Imāms, and these purely dictatorial *uṣūl*. In reality, this distinction does not seem to be of great importance. The *ḥadīth* books of direct disciples and companions of the Imāms were most likely dictated as well; these individuals are, after all, the first links in a large number of narrations. The only real distinction seems to be that the *uṣūl* do not generally deal with specific subjects, while the *ḥadīth* books do. In all the *rijāl* texts, these early *ḥadīth* compilations of the Imāms’ companions are all referred to by subject-matter based titles (the Book of Prayer, the Book of Pilgrimage, etc.). But there is no reason why the Imāms would not have sat with their disciples and held dictation sessions where only specific topics were discussed, and indeed some *uṣūl* do have specific subject-matter titles as well.<sup>268</sup> The actual originals of these sources do not seem to be extant today, nor are any of the more specific *ḥadīth* collections attributed to the Imāms’ disciples. Most likely, there was no concerted effort to retain these books in their original form. Once their narrations were included and, most importantly, *organized* in a larger “encyclopedia” like *al-Kāfī*, the originals were simply set aside. Specifically, the transmission of the 400 “sources” in their original form seems to have been abandoned by the 4<sup>th</sup> century, though direct

<sup>264</sup> Ibid; Kohlberg “al-Uṣul” 139. the great emphasis given to the transmission and preservation of narrations is referred to in the *as/* of Zayd Az-Zarrād: Muṣṭafawī, 3.

<sup>265</sup> Kohlberg “al-Uṣul” 129.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid. 130.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid. 132.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid. 149.

references to these sources do continue (in scattered form) up until the Safavid period,<sup>269</sup> several centuries after their original writing. But in general it would seem that, for Shī'ah scholars, they seemed to have served their purpose, and by the time of al-Kulaynī the main task was to begin a more rigorous and organized collection of *ḥadīth*, based on these earlier sources.

It should also be noted that the composition of these original sources (including but not limited to the *uṣūl*) seems to have begun around the same time that an organized Sunnī *ḥadīth* literature was taking form. Given that Sunnī jurists were writing their own books of *ḥadīth*, attributing their positions to the Prophet, it seems highly unlikely that the Shī'ī Imāms would not have ordered their followers to begin recording their statements. At a time where a rival orthodoxy about the Prophet's teaching was being created and put in written form, would not the Shī'ah (as rivals to this emerging orthodoxy) have also wanted to "go on record" about the "truth" of Islam? As stated, it seems that it was primarily the sixth Imām Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq who was responsible for initiating the recording of *ḥadīth* in the form of the "400" *uṣūl* and other works. He died right around the time that the Sunnī "Imām" Mālik was writing one of the first systematic Sunnī *ḥadīth* books, the *Muwaṭṭā'*. It seems highly likely that, given this climate, the Shī'ah would have felt an urgent need to compile their own *ḥadīths*, given, then, that the Imāms' companions are attributed with a large number of works, in a number of *ḥadīths* these companions are instructed to write down what they heard, and that the Imāms' companions were mostly literate and well educated individuals.

Another issue that should also be taken into consideration in approaching these texts is the way that *isnāds* were used by early Imāmī scholars. Early Imāmī Shī'ī scholars did not employ the *ḥadīth* classification system in vogue amongst Sunnīs. Narrations seemed to be accepted in an entirely uncritical fashion, without consideration of who narrated them.<sup>270</sup> A number of narrations state that one should never reject a *ḥadīth* on the grounds of who narrated it, even if it is narrated by one of the Khawārij (the sect that killed the first Imām 'Alī. They seem to represent the archetype of evil within early Imāmī Shī'ī *ḥadīth* literature). It was not until several centuries later that the Sunnī methodology of *ḥadīth* and *isnād* classification was adopted by many Shī'ah scholars. There appears to have been a basic *religious* conviction amongst early narrators to *not* reject narrations in the way that Sunnī scholars did, unless there was some primarily *textual* reason for doing so. If there was any

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid. 137.

<sup>270</sup> Momen 185.

confusion about a narration, the believers were instructed to go to the Imām and seek clarification.<sup>271</sup> If this was not possible, other narrations laid down principles of how to deal with this.<sup>272</sup> For example, one may simply choose between one narration and the other; one may attempt to see if they really contradict each other and “combine” them in a logical way; one may choose the one that seems more authentic, that accords with the Qur’ān, that is more “famous”, and so forth.<sup>273</sup> Whether or not these narrations themselves are authentic is not at issue here. What is important is that; given that these narrations (authentic or otherwise) were included in large books of *ḥadīth* like *al-Kāfī*, the issue of narrator-based determinations of authenticity was not of enormous importance to the *ḥadīth* scholars themselves. This does not mean, of course, that the Imāms are said to have allowed their followers to follow forged or inauthentic narrations. But given the fact that determining the authenticity of narrations is such a difficult, complicated, and mostly impossible process, we may conclude that a great amount of leeway was given in this area.

Thus, determining the actual authenticity of a narration does not seem to have been a supremely important issue for the early community; it was for the Imām to come out and disavow certain narrations, and correct the believers. It does appear that Shī‘ah scholars, from a very early period, composed works on the reliability of narrators;<sup>274</sup> but the unreliability of a narrator did not seem to necessitate the automatic rejection of a narration. On the other hand, for the believers to do this themselves seems, in the view of the Imāms, to be outside of an ordinary person’s capacity. It seems to be implicitly acknowledged that, given the possibility of forgery and error, it will never be possible for a believer to gain certainty about the authority of every narration he or she hears if they do not have direct access to the Imām.<sup>275</sup> Instead, the believers were instructed to act on whatever they

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<sup>271</sup> al-Fadli 57.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid. 58.

<sup>273</sup> Cf. Aṣ-Ṣadr *Durūs* 3:382-408.

<sup>274</sup> There are scores of early Imāmī scholars who are attributed books with titles like *Kitāb Ar-rijāl*, or something similar. Many of these works, however, seem to be devoted more to determining the fidelity of early companions (based upon their participation in ‘Ali’s military campaigns) rather than being specifically focused on *ḥadīth* transmission (Arioli 53); these books were probably intended as historical records of who was on the side of Truth and who was against it. The fact that the important technical term “reliable” (*thiqah*) only occurs twice in the earliest extant *rijāl* work, that of al-Barqī (al-Barqī *Rijāl* 23, 34; on the dry and skeletal nature of this work, cf. Arioli 55) would seem to give credence to the idea that early Imāmī *rijāl* was purely historical in nature, and had not yet adopted the technical vocabulary of Sunnī *rijāl*. Most of these early *rijāl* manuscripts have been lost (Ibid. 52).

<sup>275</sup> This was obviously a problem not isolated to the Occultation. If the Imām was in Madīnāh and one of his followers was in Baghdad, given the absence of any modern technology it would be impossible for that person to travel to the Imām whenever he had questions. Other Imāms who were imprisoned (such as the seventh Imām) would also have been inaccessible for long periods of time.

heard, and if what they heard contradicted something else they heard, to employ the principles that the Imāms taught. Making specific determinations as to whether or not a given narration was authentic seems to have been of less concern, given the leeway that the Imāms themselves had given to the believers when it came to acting on certain narrations.

Given this fact, it still seems that the compilers of these books were fairly confident about what they passed on. Importantly enough for our present study, this seems to have been based on a hermeneutical assessment of the text (*matn*), rather than the narrators. Even though almost all of the early Imāmī Shī'ī *ḥadīth* literature includes chains of narration, it does not appear that these chains were included to make a decisive determination as to whether or not a narration was “sound”. They seem to be merely a kind of citation. If the narrator cited happens to be somebody considered reliable, all the better, but the early compilations do not give evidence of having been strict in this regard. Momen quotes one scholar as saying that, of the 16,199 *ḥadīths* in *al-Kāfī*, 9,485 would be judged as “weak” by the standards of *isnād* criticism developed later.<sup>276</sup> al-Kulaynī felt quite confident in his book. He writes in the introduction, addressing one of his students about the book:

...You have also said that you want a book which is sufficient [*kāfī*, a derivative of the title of the book] which suffices for all the sciences of the knowledge of religion, and which is sufficient for the student, and which the one seeking guidance may make recourse to, and which anybody can use who desires knowledge of religion and action on the basis of that knowledge, itself based upon *correct reports* (*āthār ṣaḥīḥah*) from the two truthful ones [*aṣ-ṣādiqayn*, the fifth and sixth Imāms] and the well-known practices (*As-sunan al-qā'imah*) which derive from them.<sup>277</sup>

Given that the Sunnī *ḥadīth* classification system was not observed by people like al-Kulaynī, his use of the term *ṣaḥīḥ* should probably be taken literally: that even though there may be obvious problems with many of the *isnāds* that he presents, he feels that these narrations are, in fact, *correct* and true in the literal sense. The compilation of these narrations should also be understood in terms of the larger way in which early Shi'ite “traditionists” understood the *ḥadīth* literature of which they are the authors. The teachings of the Imāms are said to contain the answer to *every* question of speculative theology and the “rationalized” *fiqh* of the Mu'tazilah *eo ipso* excluded. Hence, it was of

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<sup>276</sup> Momen 338, footnote 4.

<sup>277</sup> *al-Kāfī* 1:8.

grave importance to record their statements as much as was possible.<sup>278</sup> As such, it was also of grave importance for early *ḥadīth* scholars to bear witness to the veracity of their books. If these compilations were inauthentic, the believers would be left with few other options. Al-Qummī also makes specific assertions about the veracity of his book, as well as the narrators therein, stating that everything that he reports comes directly from the Imāms:

We mention and report from all that has come to us from our *mashāyikh* and our reliable narrators on behalf of those whom Allāh has ordered us to obey, whose holy authority (*walāyah*) He has made incumbent upon us, those whom no one's works are accepted except through them.<sup>279</sup>

As such, even though a certain amount of leeway seems to have been given to the Shī'ah with regards to narrations, it seems that the authors of the books under discussion were very confident about the correctness of what they passed on in these books. It does not seem that al-Kulaynī and others merely wanted to pass on everything they heard for the sake of compiling an encyclopedia, as the Safavid-era jurist al-Majlisī did in his massive *Bihār al-Anwār*. As we have discussed, al-Kulaynī's work contains some of the most important "extremist" narrations, and the entire *Kitāb al-Hujjah* of *al-Kāfi* is devoted to an Imāmology where, in many cases, Divine attributes are predicated on the Imāms. This chapter is quite long and is hardly a collection of "rare" narrations that al-Kulaynī had doubts about. al-Kulaynī has also stated his belief in the soundness of everything that he has passed on in this book. This knowledge will help in understanding how much confidence that authors like al-Kulaynī had in the authenticity of teachings that many Imāmī Shī'ites considered "extreme".

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<sup>278</sup> Amir-Moezzi "Remarques" 7.

<sup>279</sup> al-Qummī 4.

## Imāmology of the Qummī School

### The Theology of the Qummī *Ḥadīth* Literature

We can now turn to the Qummī *ḥadīth* literature itself, and explore the ways that *ghulāḥ* theological and Imāmological speculation overlaps with that of “mainstream” scholars such as al-Kulaynī and aṣ-Ṣaffār al-Qummī. Much of Shī‘ite theology revolves around finding a way through which human beings can relate to what is an ultimately transcendent deity. This idea of transcendence and the mystery of the Divine is very important in Shī‘ism. In many ways, Shī‘ites take the basic Islamic doctrine of monotheism (*tawḥīd*) to a height that is not often present within Sunnīsm, at least outside of the Sufi tradition. For example, most Shī‘ah theological discourse has been emphatic about the inability of believers to “see” God in any physical way, and has also been quite firmly opposed to anthropomorphism in relation to God. As is known, one of the major theological disputes between Shī‘ism and Sunnīsm concerns the interpretation of anthropomorphic verses in the Qur’ān, such as “The hand of Allāh is above them”.<sup>280</sup> Many Sunnī ‘*ulamā*’ have argued that these verses have to be interpreted literally. If God says that He has a hand, then He has a hand. To avoid a completely anthropomorphic theology, however, Sunnī ‘*ulamā*’ introduced the concept of *bi lā kayf*, “without asking how”, and so it is said that one must believe that God has a hand without asking about the nature or quiddity of that hand.<sup>281</sup> There is, in this doctrine, at least some room for making comparisons between human beings and God. He is somewhat like us; He has a hand, an eye, a foot, etc., though in a way that is certainly vastly different from our own. But Shī‘ahs have generally accepted the permissibility, even necessity, of interpreting this class of verses in a non-anthropomorphic way. God’s Hand refers to His Power, His Eye refers to His Omniscience, etc. Shī‘ism seems much more anxious to defend God’s Transcendence, and to place Him completely beyond the limit of humanity’s ordinary, rational faculties.

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<sup>280</sup> 48:10.

<sup>281</sup> Fakhry 206.

Orthodox Imāmī Shī'ism seems to argue for a "middle path" between positing a God so transcendent that He becomes irrelevant to people's lives, and the idea that God is similar enough to Creation that He can be said to have a hand and foot in a "literal" fashion. The former position is best characterized as *ta'tīl*, which literally means "stripping away". In the theological context the term came to refer to the position of denying God any positive attributes. Interestingly, the famous mystic 'Ibn 'Arabī associated this view with the scholars of rational theology (*kalām*), who unwittingly posited an absolutely unknowable deity that "no one could love".<sup>282</sup> The rejection of *ta'tīl* is not just an ontological or theological question, but an epistemological one about how one comes to know God, and a spiritual question that lies at the heart of much of Islamic mysticism.<sup>283</sup> The latter position, where God is viewed as being in some way analogous to His Creation, is usually referred to as *tashbīh*, which can mean to make analogies or comparisons, in this case between God and man. This position comes under a great deal of attack in the Shī'ah *ḥadīth* literature, especially its implication that God is a being subject to physical vision. Amir-Moezzi mentions one of these *ḥadīths* in his *Divine Guide*. This is a *ḥadīth* of the tenth Imām, 'Alī al-Hādī:

Visibility is only possible when there is transparent air between the subject seeing and object being seen; without this air and without a light between the subject and object, there can be no visibility. Now, the existence of a common cause of the act between the subject and the object *implies a similarity of nature between the two*, and such a position is nothing but *tashbīh*.<sup>284</sup>

One of the important teachings of the Twelver Imāms is that a believer should avoid going to either extreme. There are some *ḥadīths* that are explicit on this subject, such as:

Imām al-Bāqir was asked: "Is it permitted to say that God is a thing?" al-Bāqir said: "Yes, since [this term] places God outside the two limits of agnosticism (*ta'tīl*) and assimilationism (*tashbīh*)".<sup>285</sup>

This idea of *ta'tīl* was perhaps taken up most extensively by the Ismā'īlīs. Abū Ya'qub As-Sijistānī opens his *magnum opus* with the following supplication:

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<sup>282</sup> Murato 8.

<sup>283</sup> Corbin, *Alone* 123-125.

<sup>284</sup> al-Kulaynī I:130.

<sup>285</sup> Qtd. in Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 44; "Aspects I'Imāmologie I" 199.



Praise to Allāh, whose praises are not reached by any who speak, and whose blessings are counted by any who count. The strivers will not satisfy His Right, none will reach Him even after the greatest effort, and no matter how deep the wise may dive, they will never reach Him. His Attribute any limit or limitation, no Name for Him exists, no Time for Him may be reckoned, and He has no End that may be appointed. He has created the creations with his power.<sup>286</sup>

This idea of the *Theos Agnostos*, the absolutely unknowable God, was extended by medieval Ismāʿīlī philosophers. Thinkers such as Hamīd ad-Dīn al-Kirmānī argued that God is so beyond the limits of reason that even categories like existence and non-existence cannot be applied to Him; this leads to a famous dictum that has become a cornerstone of Ismāʿīlī philosophy: “God does not exist, nor does He not not-exist”.<sup>287</sup> For medieval Ismāʿīlī philosophers, *taʿtīl* was of great importance, and one could argue that the bulk of medieval Ismāʿīlī theological inquiry was an attempt to take *taʿtīl* to its absolute limits.<sup>288</sup> All predications of God are denied, and it is for this reason that Ismāʿīlī philosophy continually emphasized the position of the Imām as the supreme horizon (*ḥadd*) of knowledge.<sup>289</sup> It is this idea, that the Imām is the threshold between the unknowable Divine and the mundane world, which would also become the basis for the understanding that al-Kulaynī and al-Qummī had of Imāmāh.<sup>290</sup> Even though the above quoted *ḥadīth* argues for the creation of a middle path beyond agnosticism and assimilationism, it might be fairer to say that the general tone of the Imāmī *ḥadīths* is a combination rather than a balancing of the two. This ideal of absolute transcendence is certainly not alien to the Imāmī Shīʿah *ḥadīth* literature, and since Ismāʿīlīs accept the same first six Imāms as the Imāmīs do (with the exception of the second Imām, Imām Ḥasan), there is no doubt that the Ismāʿīlī philosophers were probably influenced by the idea of Divine transcendence that appears in the Imāmī *ḥadīth* literature. One could argue that the theological speculations of thinkers like As-Sijistānī or al-Kirmānī were, ultimately, an attempt to recast an idea already presented by Imām al-Bāqir and Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq in a more summary and polemical form in the *ḥadīth* literature. In the section of *al-Kāfī* dealing with *tawḥīd*, one will see a repeated and continual emphasis on this theme, especially with regards to the Divine attributes (a subject that was much debated by Muslim philosophers even during the time of the Imāms).

<sup>286</sup> Walker 39.

<sup>287</sup> al-Kirmānī 149-150.

<sup>288</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 49.

<sup>289</sup> Corbin *Cyclical* 84-87.

<sup>290</sup> See Fakhry's discussion on *tashbīḥ* (anthropomorphism) and Shīʿism, 41.

The first sermon of *Nahj al-Balāgh*<sup>291</sup> is explicit in terms of this subject, though the tone is less philosophical and more rhetorical than those found in other books:

The best in religion is knowledge of Him, and the perfection of knowing Him is to acknowledge Him in truth, and the perfection of acknowledgment in Truth is His Oneness (*tawhīd*), and the perfection of His Oneness is purity towards Him, and the perfection of Purity towards Him is to deny Him attributes. This, because every attribute bears witness to the fact that every description is other than what is described, and everything described bears witness that it is other than what describes it. Who ever describes Allāh, May He be Glorified, has attached to Him, and who ever attaches to Him has doubled Him, and whoever has doubled Him has divided him, and whoever has divided Him is ignorant of Him.<sup>292</sup>

This theology is based on a generally negative theology of God, where transcendence is the primary concern. This negative theology leads to another important theological stance that will be of great importance for the understanding of Imāmāh which is presented in the early *ḥadīth* literature: that deductive reasoning cannot lead anybody towards knowledge of God.<sup>293</sup> Instead, it is the figure of the Imām (as theophany) that allows the believer to know anything about his Creator, and makes it possible to avoid absolute *ta'tīl* and begin ascribing positive attributes to God. Alongside of this negative theology, then, we find numerous narrations where the practice of '*ilm al-kalām* (dialectical, rational theology) is condemned. Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq presents a whole chapter on this discussion in his *Tawhīd*.

Abū Ja'far [al-Bāqir] said: Talk [use *kalām*] with regards to the Creation of Allāh, and do not talk about Allāh. Indeed, *kalām* with regards to Allāh will gain them no increase except in loss.<sup>294</sup>

Abū Ja'far said: Use *kalām* about anything, but do not use it about Allāh.<sup>295</sup>

Mention anything about the glory of Allāh that you will, but do not speak of His Essence. Indeed, you cannot say anything about His Essence except that He is greater than that.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> It should be noted that *Nahj al-Balāgh* is a much later *ḥadīth* work than those that we have studied so far.

<sup>292</sup> *Nahj al-Balāgh* Sermon 1.

<sup>293</sup> Newman *Formative* 116-117.

<sup>294</sup> Aṣ-Ṣadūq *Tawhīd* 454.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

The narrations in this regard are quite numerous, as noted by Amir-Moezzi.<sup>297</sup> The following *ḥadīth* of *al-Kāfī* expands on this theme. It consists of a discussion between Imām Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq and one of his most well-known disciples, Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam, who followed a very different school of thought concerning Imāmology than mystics like Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Ju'fi. A heavy distinction is drawn between the Divine Names as such and the Divine Reality that they indicate. Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq criticizes anyone who would assume a fundamental unity between the two, or as might be put in modern parlance, between the signified and the signifier.

Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq: Oh Hishām! [The Name] Allāh is derived from the word God (*ilah*), and a god necessitates a being which is described by Divinity.<sup>298</sup> A name is not the same as the Named, so whoever worships the Name to the exclusion of the Meaning has committed disbelief (*kufr*) and has not worshipped anything, and he who worships the Name and the Meaning together has committed disbelief and worshipped two. But worshipping the Meaning to the exclusion of the Name, this is *tawḥīd*. Do you understand Hishām?

Hishām: Give me more [knowledge].

Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq: Verily Allāh has ninety-nine names, and if each one of these Names was the same as the Named then each one of these Names would be a god. However, the Name "Allāh" is what is indicated by these Names, and yet all of them are other than him. O Hishām, "bread" is merely a name for something eaten [not the thing eaten itself], and "water" is a name for something drunk, and "shirt" is a name for something worn, and "fire" is a name for something burning.<sup>299</sup>

Even the Divine Names themselves are seen as being of no avail in achieving true knowledge of God. Of course, one should not assume that the Names are completely denied within early Imāmī Shī'ī theology. Lalani argues that Imām al-Bāqir adopted a pragmatic approach to the use of the Divine attributes. They help the believer to understand God, but they are not to be confused with God Himself, or the "meaning" that underlies such names.<sup>300</sup> This idea is made explicit in Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq's conversation with Hishām. It is also alluded to in teaching that God is a "thing" unlike all other things, referred to above. Imām al-Bāqir says:

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<sup>297</sup> Moezzi 15.

<sup>298</sup> The word here is *ma'lūh*, and can be interpreted in two different ways here. The standard lexical meaning of *ma'lūh* is the same as *ma'būd*, and literally means one who is described as being Divine. The other meaning of this word, as it was often used by Ibn 'Arabī much later, could be interpreted similar to the word *marbūb*, the "servant" of a Divine Lord, a *rabb*.

<sup>299</sup> *al-Kāfī* 1:87.

<sup>300</sup> Lalani 94.

God is completely different to whatever you image; He neither resembles anything nor can imagination [ever] attain Him, for how could imagination ever attain Him while He is totally different to what is bound by reason, and [also] different from what can be pictured in imagination? He can be imagined only as an entity beyond reason.<sup>301</sup>

We see that the “meaning” is not defined in the *ḥadīth*, nor is it systematically defined elsewhere in the Imāmī Shī‘ah *ḥadīth* literature. This is a role that the Imām begins to play, on some level, as we will see.

What is important to note from the foregoing discussion is that the basis of a somewhat mystical Imāmology lies in *rationalist theology*. Arguments are made about the transcendence of God that are neither esoteric, nor based on mystical concepts. What we see during this time is Shī‘ite theologians and the Shī‘ite Imāms themselves entering into a dispute that was already raging in the Muslim world: the relationship between the Divine attributes and the Divine essence. Imāmology, in part, was an attempt to answer this very exoteric and rational of questions. The mystical view of Imāmology, where the Imām is posited as manifesting God and thereby making Him knowable in some way to His Creation, seems to have only emerged from the *ghulāh*. The total absence of any such doctrine being attributed to ‘Alī except in Ṣafāvid-era texts like the “Sermon of Luminous Knowledge” (discussed below) would seem to indicate that not only ‘Alī, but none of his followers, ever proposed such an understanding of Imāmah. If the heresiographical works are to be trusted, most of the *ghulāh* who believed the Imām was either Divine, an incarnation of God, or a manifestation of God, had little concern with the succession issues. However, their view of the Imām as a *theophany* could, with some modification, be used as a uniquely Shī‘ite way of answering the question of Divine attributes and the possibility for any kind of positive theology.

The fact that there is little to no interest in such doctrines amongst ‘Alid legitimists before the period of Muḥammad al-Bāqir is important: for it was about this time that the early Mu‘tazilah began to preach, and that the controversies concerning Divine attributes began. We have seen that, during the time of Ja‘far, Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam was particularly concerned with this issue. Rather than seeing mystical Imāmology as evidence for an inherent mysticism and esotericism amongst ‘Alid legitimists (something that is impossible to reconcile with the fact that such doctrines are never even

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<sup>301</sup> Qtd. in Ibid.

attributed to 'Alī until centuries after the Qumm school period), it seems that a re-interpretation of *ghulāh* Imāmology was a way that many Shī'ites sought to answer the question of God's attributes and how those attributes can be known to a person. We will discuss this further below.

### The Imām: God Manifest Through a Human Form?

The unknowability of God has definite similarities with Valentinian Gnosticism, and forms a great part of "extremist" Shī'ī theological speculation. For such sects, the entirety of the universe is seen to be in a state of forgetfulness and heedlessness. This is not merely a temporal state, but goes back to a fundamental disobedience stretching back to pre-eternity.<sup>302</sup> Humanity has to be called back to a knowledge of God, but this knowledge cannot be achieved through reason or sense-perception. Once the speculative dogmatics of *kalām* are condemned in this way, we can understand the function that the Imām is designed to serve. In the early *ḥadīth* literature, he is ultimately viewed as the being through whom God becomes known; in a real sense, he *is* the Revealed God.<sup>303</sup> This earlier formulation must be seen in contrast to post-*ghaybah* Shī'ah '*ulamā*'s understanding of what it means for the Imāms to be the "proof of Allāh" (*ḥujjat Allāh*). For many other (and apparently later) scholars, the Imām is the being through whom God's *Law* becomes known, not God Himself.<sup>304</sup> This later interpretation reduces the Imām to a legalistic function,<sup>305</sup> but in the early *ḥadīth* literature this law-giving capacity is generally portrayed as secondary to the Imām's *theophanic* function as the being who allows God to be seen, known, and understood.<sup>306</sup> This is where the deification of the Imāms begins: they are seen as the beings who give gnosis (knowledge) about the *Theos Agnostos*, by *manifesting* the Divine reality in their own persons. They are the beings who illuminate what would otherwise remain an absolutely unknowable God. They are seen as the *barzakh*, the "meeting-point"

<sup>302</sup> Halm "Das Buch der Schatten I" 220.

<sup>303</sup> Amir-Moezzi "Aspects de l'Imāmologie" 201.

<sup>304</sup> Here, we have to draw a distinction between a purely theoretical understanding of God born from either rational, discursive theology or revelation from revelation itself, and the kind of "spiritual wisdom" *ma'rifah* that would be of such importance for all forms of Islamic esotericism. As will be seen, the Imāms speak frequently of the "heart-vision" of God, implying a kind of transcendent experience through which God is genuinely known. In the early Imāmī Shī'ī *ḥadīth* literature, it would seem that this type of "immediate knowledge" of God stands in contrast to the intellectual formulations given by theologians.

<sup>305</sup> Even though this idea would only become popular later on, the *muqassirah* faction did hold to this position. One of the leading early Imāmī scholars who held to this position was Faḍl ibn Shādhān, who lived during the time of the eighth Imām. In some narrations he is cursed as a deviant and heretic. Cf. Bayhom-Daou 149.

<sup>306</sup> Corbin *Alone* 84-85.

or “intermediary” between the infinite and the finite.<sup>307</sup> But more than this, they are seen to be the very embodiment of all that is knowable of God. They are referred to as the eye of God, the hand of God, the face of God, the heart of God, the side of God, the tongue of God, the ear of God, the Light of God, the Throne of God, and many other Divine attributes.<sup>308</sup> Furthermore, we find a large number of narrations where the Imāms are referred to as the ones who created the heavens and the earth, who will eventually destroy it before the Day of Judgment, and the ones who will apportion heaven and Hell on that day. Though we do not find any narration in the Shī‘ah *ḥadīth* literature where any of the Imāms specifically say: “I am Allāh” or “I am God”, we find the distinction between God and Imām somewhat blurred. The Imām is viewed as a perfect theophany, as being the very image of God. In fact, every possible expression of Divinity is made in the Imāmī *ḥadīth* literature *except* the direct claim of Divinity “I am God”. We will discuss these narrations in detail below. Here, the reader should only be aware of the theological basis for the deification, which (ironically enough) is based on an extremely *transcendent* understanding of God, and attempting to answer the question of how such an Exalted being can be known by His Creation. The answer, in the Shī‘ah *ḥadīth* literature, is that it is through knowledge of the Imām, the Face of God, that a believer obtains knowledge of God.

This specific idea is referred to in a number of narrations. Lalani cites Imām al-Bāqir’s interpretation of the verse: “Is he who was dead and We raised him unto life and set for him a light whereby he walks among the people, similar to him who is in utter darkness from which there is no way out”<sup>309</sup>, Imām al-Bāqir is reported to have said that the dead are those who are completely ignorant, devoid of all knowledge. The light by which such a person walks (a *resurrecting* Light, as we have seen from the verse itself; the similarities between this teaching and that of the Gnostic or docetic understanding of Jesus are plain)<sup>310</sup> is the Imām. Conversely, those who are lost in darkness, who have no hope of escape, are those that do not know the Imām.<sup>311</sup> Here, the Imām is given a much higher status than a mere law-giver. He is in himself a being of Light, and through the (mystical) perception of that Light, one comes to know God. Knowledge of *him* (as opposed to knowledge of his legal decrees) is given absolute soteriological status; it is seen as the *only* kind of salvation.

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<sup>307</sup> Amir-Moezzi “Aspects de l’Imāmologie I” 194. There, he describes this intermediary position as being one of the ultimate mysteries, the secret of secrets of theosophy.

<sup>308</sup> Moezzi 45.

<sup>309</sup> 6:122.

<sup>310</sup> Cf. Corbin *Cyclical* 67-72.

<sup>311</sup> Lalani 68.

### Knowledge of God as Knowledge of the Imām

In terms of the Shī'ah *ḥadīth* literature, the ontological and theological knowledge of the Imām seems eminently important in deciphering the Imāms' instruction that "one must worship the *meaning* as opposed to the *name*". The idea that the Imām is the Light, knowledge of which gives salvation, would seem to indicate that it is through knowledge of the Imām that the "meaning" of the Divine Reality is grasped. It is worth noting that the distinction between the "meaning" and the "name", discussed above, is of critical importance in Nuṣayrī Shī'ism, the most famous of the *ghulāh* sects. Seemingly in line with the wide variety of "orthodox" Imāmī narrations where the Imām is described as the Face and Heart of Allāh, they unequivocally affirm that the ultimate "meaning" of that which is worshipped is nothing other than 'Alī himself.<sup>312</sup> Though they affirm the Oneness of God, they also assert the existence of a Trinity that seems to derive from *ḥadīths* of this nature, with obvious modifications. The first "person" of this Trinity is the Meaning, the second is the Name, and the third is the Gate. With regard to the specific dispensation that began with Muḥammad in the seventh-century AD, Muḥammad is said to be the "name" that leads towards the ultimate meaning, that of 'Alī. Salmān al-Farsī, who for many Shī'ites represents the epitome of the true believer, is presented as the Gate into this reality.<sup>313</sup> The founder of the Nuṣayrī sect, Ibn Nuṣayr, became the gate for the Eleventh Imām, and was seen to follow in the foot-steps of the famous "extremists" of earlier generations like Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Ju'fī and Mufaḍḍal ibn 'Umar as the holder of a secret "revelation".<sup>314</sup> It is the Nuṣayrī belief that, at all times, God manifests Himself through this Trinity.<sup>315</sup> 'Alī, then, is the epiphany of the *Theos Agnostos*, the *Deus Absconditus* (and sometimes identified with Him as well)<sup>316</sup> who (through a mysterious process of manifestation) manifested Himself in the form of 'Alī, and various other figures (such as Jesus) throughout history.<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Moosa 312.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid. 342-351.

<sup>314</sup> Halm "Das Buch der Schatten I" 72.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid. 75.

<sup>316</sup> Cf. the story of the Nusyri Fall from paradise, Ibid., where 'Alī is described as the "completely hidden" and the Nuṣayrīs are cast out for not acknowledging him as such.

<sup>317</sup> Bar-Asher and Kofsky 30-32.

The specific assertion that ‘Alī is, in fact, the meaning that underlies the name (or names) is not stated within the Imāmī *ḥadīth* literature, at least not in the way that Nuṣayrīs and others would understand. The idea that the Imām somehow embodies the *revealed* God seems fairly implicit in a number of narrations. Many *ḥadīths* posit that the true reality of the Divine Names is to be found in the figures of the Imāms themselves, making nearly explicit the idea that the worshipped God (*al-ma’būd*) is none other than the Imām himself. One famous *ḥadīth* of Imām al-Bāqir reads:

Indeed, Allāh the Exalted created Fourteen Lights from the Light of His Glory, ten thousand years before He created Adam. That Light was our spirits... We are the most beautiful names of Allāh. Allāh does not accept anybody’s worship unless they have the knowledge (*ma’rifah*) of us.<sup>318</sup>

Through us Allāh is known, and through us Allāh is worshipped.<sup>319</sup>

If it were not for Allāh we would not be known, and if it were not for us Allāh would not be known.<sup>320</sup>

With these narrations, we see that knowledge of the Imām and knowledge of God are made one. Epistemologically, the Divine and the Imām are unified; it is not surprising, then, that many would come to believe that they were ontologically unified as well. The Imāms are seen to be the embodiment of the Divine reality, and knowledge of them is knowledge of God.

We have also had occasion to reference the Nuṣayrī belief that Muḥammad is the “name”, the one who leads towards the Divine Meaning, but *not* the meaning itself. That is identified with the “luminous reality” of ‘Alī, not, of course, the mere physical “form” of ‘Alī known to the profane, but his being of Light, visible only to the true believer.<sup>321</sup> The interrelationship between these two “persons” of the Trinity is a complex subject that could constitute an entire body of research in and of itself. Here we can only summarize. Al-Khaṣībī argued that the name is an emanation that comes from the primordial Meaning. Using a metaphor that is well known to students of Islamic mysticism, it is likened to the radiance of light that comes from the physical sun; they are not absolutely distinct,

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<sup>318</sup> *Bihār al-Anwār* 4:25.

<sup>319</sup> Aṣ-Ṣadūq, *At-Tawḥīd* 152.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid. 290.

<sup>321</sup> Part of the Nuṣayrī mystical ascent is recognizing the mere form in which the Divinity is perceived as basically an illusion, a docetic reality devoid of substance, and achieving a mystical union with the Meaning *qua* Meaning. See Bar-Asher and Kofsky 80-84.



yet they are not absolutely one.<sup>322</sup> ‘Alī is identified with this primordial meaning, the Divine Essence as such; the *ism*, Muḥammad, emanates from him. This would, of course, necessitate the pre-eminence of ‘Alī in the Divine Trinity. The figure of the Name (Muḥammad) and the Gate (Salmān) are of much more subsidiary importance, created by the Divine meaning itself, and emanating from Him.<sup>323</sup> The Name, as the term would imply, indicates the meaning, but like all signifiers also “veils” the meaning. But this process of veiling is of crucial importance; the Divine Reality, ‘Alī, is so infinite and so luminous that it could not possibly be grasped by human eyes, minds, or hearts.<sup>324</sup> It must be veiled in order for it to be seen, and we see this idea of the “veils” that make things manifest (the *mazhar* which is also a *hijāb*) became a crucial part of Ibn ‘Arabī’s mysticism.<sup>325</sup> Here, Muḥammad is the veil under which the Meaning, ‘Alī, hid Himself. In a sense they are one, but in another sense they are different (in the way that the emanations of the One in Neo-Platonism or the emanations of the First Intellect in medieval Ismā‘īlism are both one and separate.<sup>326</sup>) This is made explicit in the Nuṣayrī catechism translated by Bar-Asher and Kofsky:

Q: If our master, the commander of the faithful, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib is God, how was it that he took a human nature?

A. Know that our master, the commander of the faithful, does not take a human nature, but he veiled himself in [the person of] Muḥammad in his cycle, and was named ‘Alī.<sup>327</sup>

Even though Shī‘ī orthodoxy would hold both of these ideas (the idea that ‘Alī is Divine, and the idea that he precedes the Prophet) as being utter blasphemy, we find a narration that is fairly explicit about this subject in *al-Kāfī*. We read:

Imām al-Bāqir said: “Through us Allāh is worshipped, and through us Allāh is known, and through us Allāh the Blessed and Exalted is made One. And Muḥammad, he is the *veil* [*hijāb*] of Allāh the Blessed and Exalted”.<sup>328</sup>

<sup>322</sup> Bar-Asher and Kofsky 100-109.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid. 35.

<sup>324</sup> Moosa 343.

<sup>325</sup> Chittick *Self-Disclosure* 120-123; See also Corbin’s excellent treatise on the theology of light and colour in the thinking of the Shaykh leader Muḥammad Karim Khan in *Temple* 13-15. Here, the “white light” of the Divine is seen to be so luminous and subtle that it cannot be grasped without being “degraded” by the addition of colour; colour becomes the veil through which “pure Light” becomes seen. The same theology seems to underlie the Nuṣayrī understanding of Muḥammad as the Divine veil.

<sup>326</sup> Cf. Al-Kirmānī 208.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid 171.

The presence of such a narration in an early text like *al-Kāfī* is, to say the least, quite shocking, and we have not found this particular narration commented on either by traditional Shī'ah scholars or Western academic commentators. The *ḥadīth* also occurs in the early *ḥadīth* work *Baṣā'ir ad-Darajāt*,<sup>329</sup> with the same *isnād*. Al-Khaṣībī, who was contemporaneous with al-Kulaynī, was no doubt inspired by such narrations, and perhaps others which al-Kulaynī did not include in *al-Kāfī*. Even though it is a single-narration *ḥadīth*, its inclusion in these two very important books indicates that this theology was at least known during the early and formative years of Imāmī Shī'ism (in fact, at the time where the Imāmīs had not yet fully identified themselves as Imāmīs).<sup>330</sup> The idea seems quite clear: similar to the belief of the Nuṣayrīs and other 'Alawī sects, the Imām is the apotheosis of the Divine meaning; the Prophet Muḥammad is merely a form which veils that reality, the "screen" through which the Divine Light shines.<sup>331</sup>

An analysis of the *isnād* is also instructive. The first narrator (the one who actually reports the *ḥadīth* from Imām al-Bāqir), Barīd ibn Mu'awiyah al-'Ijili, is one of the most highly praised *ḥadīth* narrators; al-Kashshī says he is one of the strongest of all the *ḥadīth* narrators, and a *faqih*.<sup>332</sup> Indeed, in one narration, Imām al-Bāqir congratulates him for being promised paradise, and lists him alongside of Zurārah and Abū Baṣīr as being those who "if it were not for them, all the work of prophecy would have been destroyed".<sup>333</sup> The second two narrators, the brothers Ismā'īl ibn Ḥabīb and al-Ḥakam ibn Ḥabīb seem to be unknown.<sup>334</sup> The fourth narrator, 'Alī ibn Salat, is regarded as reliable by An-Najāshī and others,<sup>335</sup> while the fifth narrator Muḥammad ibn Jamhūr also seems to be unknown.<sup>336</sup> The final narrator, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Amar al-'Asharī, is one of al-Kulaynī's major narrators and is regarded as reliable.<sup>337</sup> What is interesting here is that, even though this narration (and perhaps others like it, not present in the traditional Imāmī corpus) would seem to

<sup>328</sup> *al-Kāfī* 1:146.

<sup>329</sup> *Baṣā'ir* 64.

<sup>330</sup> Cf. Arjomand's discussion in his "Crisis".

<sup>331</sup> It should be noted that there is some dispute about whether or not the other Imāms (i.e., the Imāms other than 'Alī) constitute the same apotheosis of the Divine Meaning or whether or not they are, in fact, *isms*. See Bar-Asher and Kofsky 31-32. Perhaps the ambiguity is the result of the degree to which the Name and Meaning are both One and not-One in Nuṣayrī theology.

<sup>332</sup> al-Khū'ī entry 1681.

<sup>333</sup> Ibn Dawūd 392.

<sup>334</sup> al-Khū'ī. entry 1323, 3853.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid. entry 8142.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid. entry 10646.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid. entry 3625

be part of the inspiration for later 'Alawī speculations, none of the people narrating it are accused of *ghuluww*, or even weakness with regards to *ḥadīths*. Two of the links are simply “unknown”, and so the *ḥadīth* could not even be classified as “weak” according to the standard dictates of *'ilm al-ḥadīth*, rather, it would merely be classified as *majhūlah*, encompassing narrators who have not been judged one way or the other.

The divinity of the Imāms also seems to be asserted in another narration of *al-Kāfī*, which follows the one above. Imām al-Bāqir was asked about the verse of Qur'ān: “They did not oppress us, but they only oppressed their own selves”.<sup>338</sup> He said:

Indeed, Allāh the Exalted is too Supreme, Mighty, Glorious, and Unreachable that He could be oppressed. *But He has intertwined us with Him*, and so oppression of us is oppression of Him, and the love of us [*walāyah*, also can be translated as the “acceptance of our authority”] is the love of Him.<sup>339</sup>

The interesting part of this *ḥadīth* is where the Imām says: ‘He has intertwined us with Himself [*khalāṭanā bi nafsih*]. The verb *khalāṭa* means to mix something up, a kind of jumbling. It is often used pejoratively, such as if a person is speaking non-sensically and one says he is doing *khalāṭ* in his speech. The specific phrase that “God has intertwined us with Himself” is repeated in another narration in *al-Kāfī*,<sup>340</sup> as well as in the sixth-century work *al-Manāqib*.<sup>341</sup> It is definitely a fairly rare *ḥadīth* in the early Imāmī Shī'ī *ḥadīth* literature. Yet the explanation that it gives of the verse under question falls in line with all the other narrations that predicate the Divine attributes, “organs”, and Light upon the Imāms. Just as knowledge and adoration of the Imāms is equal to the knowledge and adoration of God, so oppression of the Imāms is made equal to oppression of Him.

#### Imāmology in *Baṣā'ir ad-Darajat*

There are subtle changes as we move from one text to another amongst the Qumm school works. *Baṣā'ir* tends to lay more emphasis on the Imām's miraculous powers, whereas *Al-Kāfī*

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<sup>338</sup> 7:160

<sup>339</sup> *al-Kāfī* 1:146.

<sup>340</sup> *al-Kāfī* 1:434.

<sup>341</sup> *al-Manāqib* 283.

includes more detailed discussions of the Imām's demiurgic role. The narrations where knowledge and worship of God are equated with knowledge of the Imāms are quite numerous in both books; this seems to form the core of early Imāmī Shī'ī teachings with regards to Imāmah.<sup>342</sup> Returning to our subject, we find that all of the positive attributes of God are applied to the Imāms in the early Imāmī Shī'ī *ḥadīth* literature. As we have seen, Nuṣayrīs argue that all of the attributes and descriptions of God that are in the Qur'ān (and, for that matter, other revelations) are all in praise of 'Alī himself; in the Imāmī *ḥadīth* literature, the emphasis is slightly different, but the outcome is the same. Here, all of the phenomenal aspects of God are specifically and unambiguously associated with the Imāms. We find more of this in the early *ḥadīth* work *Baṣā'ir ad-Darajāt*, where there is an entire chapter devoted to the subject. We read:

Asuad ibn Sa'id said: "I was with Abū Ja'far [al-Bāqir], and he said to me without any question on my part: 'We are the proofs of Allāh. We are the Gate of Allāh. We are the tongue of Allāh. We are the Face of Allāh. We are the Eye of Allāh in His Creation. We are the holders of His Command over his servants'".<sup>343</sup>

Ḥaṣhim ibn Abī 'Umayr said: "I heard the Prince of Believers say: 'I am the Eye of Allāh. I am the Hand of Allāh. I am the side of Allāh. I am the Gate of Allāh.'"<sup>344</sup>

'Abdallāh ibn Abī Ya'fūr said: "Abū 'Abdillāh [aṣ-Ṣādiq] said to me: 'O Ibn Abī Ya'fur! Indeed Allāh the Blessed and Exalted is One, absolutely One in Oneness. He is singular in His Command. He Created the Creation, and He has made them unique before this Command. And indeed we are those beings, O Ibn Abī Ya'fur! We are the Proofs of Allāh over His Servants and His Witnesses in His Creation. We are the storehouse of His Knowledge, and we are those who call to His Path. Whoever obeys us, has obeyed Allāh'".<sup>345</sup>

'Alī As-Sā'iḥ said: "I asked Abū al-Ḥasan Ar-Riḍā about the words of Allāh: "Lest the soul would say! Woe upon me for what I neglected at the side of Allāh. Indeed, I am amongst the lost".<sup>346</sup> He said: "The side of Allāh is the Prince of Believers, and so are those who follow him from the inheritors".<sup>347</sup>

Amir-Moezzi describes these sermons as being like a hammer, casting the audience into fright.<sup>348</sup> Indeed, these ecstatic declarations could be classified as a whole genre within the early

<sup>342</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 173.

<sup>343</sup> *Baṣā'ir* 62; *al-Kāfi* 144.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> 39:56.

<sup>347</sup> *Baṣā'ir* Ibid.

Shi'ite *ḥadīth* literature, where the pounding phrase “*I AM*” is repeated again and again, with the predicates rising to a fevered pitch (His Hand, His Face, the Cause of Causes, the Creator). The latter *ḥadīth* is of the utmost importance for the development of later *ghulāb* sects: for Nuṣayrīs, the “orphans” are the five beings who are subordinate to and created by the Gate. They are demiurges in their own right; they are charged with creating and maintaining various facets of physical reality in the heavens and the earths.<sup>349</sup> Though there is nothing about this particular doctrine in the *ḥadīth* cited, it is obvious that this narration was intended to be understood in an esoteric or metaphorical sense. The father of the orphans, if understood literally, would be even more of a linguistic absurdity in Arabic than it would be in English. Even if one does not accept the Nuṣayrī doctrine, the idea that ‘Alī is the father of the orphans, the refuge and place of safety for all who fear, and so forth, all seem to indicate a kind of Divine role, where ‘Alī is perceived as a heavenly father figure over Creation.

Though this particular narration is not frequently found in the *ḥadīth* literature, phrases like “We are the Face of Allāh” and “We are the Hand of Allāh” occur numerously.<sup>350</sup> These narrations could be said to have an eminently *ghuluww* spirit to them; yet in many ways they are only an extension of the rationalist ideas of Imāmāh discussed above. It is through the Imām that God speaks, and through the Imām that God makes Himself known. The line between the absolute divinity of God and the divinity of the Imāms becomes blurred. Some Nuṣayrīs and ‘Alawīs have argued against Imāmī Shī‘ahs, saying that the statement ‘Alī is the Face of God or the Hand of God but not actually God Himself has the effect of making God into parts, which violates His Essential Oneness.

Returning to the specific doctrines of the Nuṣayrīs the Imām is nothing but God’s self-disclosure to the people of the world. How this is done remains a mystery, in the same way as the Incarnation is for Christianity;<sup>351</sup> but the idea of God taking on a human form in order to make Himself known to Creation is repeated throughout Nuṣayrī doctrine.<sup>352</sup> The *Kitāb al-Usus* argues that all of the transcendent discussions of God present in the Qur’ān refer to God as He existed “before” Creation, and so in a certain sense the orthodox idea of *tawḥīd* is accepted. But once Creation occurs, it then becomes a necessity for Him to manifest Himself in a human form, and that form is the Imāms

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<sup>348</sup> Amir-Moezzi “Aspects de l’Imāmologie I” 194.

<sup>349</sup> Moosa 357.

<sup>350</sup> al-Faḍlī *Introduction* 93-98.

<sup>351</sup> Bar-Asher and Kofsky 171.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid. 51.

who, by making God incarnate, allow Him to be manifest.<sup>353</sup> This theology seems hardly distinguishable from that present in the early Imāmī Shī'ī *ḥadīth* literature. The idea that the Imām is the Face of God, the Hand of God, and all the Beautiful Names of God, would seem to be making the same basic point: the Divine Reality does not become known or Manifest until it takes human form. We have already seen how the more sophisticated theological speculations of the Nuṣayrīs seem to be presaged in the early, authoritative Shī'ah *ḥadīth* literature.

The major difference that most researchers find existing between the theological doctrines of groups like the Nuṣayrīs and those espoused in the early Imāmī Shī'ī *ḥadīth* literature is that the Nuṣayrīs are often seen as believing that 'Alī is the Incarnation of God, whereas this phrase does not occur anywhere in the early Imāmī *ḥadīth* literature and does not seem to have been taught by the Imāms in anyway. But this might be a matter of language more than anything else. The idea that 'Alī was the Incarnation of God, in the way that Christian theology would understand the term "Incarnation", is not a canonical part of Nuṣayrī belief, though some have understood the idea of God's epiphany in 'Alī in this way. Many Nuṣayrī theologians specifically reject the idea of a hypostatic union; 'Alī, as God, is not seen to have a human and Divine aspect, but is *purely* Divine.<sup>354</sup> Indeed, the verses of *surat al-ikhhlāṣ* "He [Allāh] does not give birth, nor is He born" is said to refer explicitly to 'Alī.<sup>355</sup> The idea of an Incarnation, then, has to be understood in more docetic terms: God appears in the form of 'Alī, which (to the uninitiated) appears as a human form. But the form is, in fact, not viewed as being truly human; it is only misperceived as such. At the end of the day, the question of how the Divine comes to appear in a seemingly human form is relegated to the realm of mystery. What seems to be at stake, then, is the question about the Essence of God: the narrations discussed above seem to make clear that the Essence of God is unknowable, and that while the Imām is *not* the Essence of God he *is* the supreme "horizon" by which God becomes known. If there is a distinction to be made, then, between the "extremist" Nuṣayrīs and the rest of the more esoterically inclined Shī'ah community (such as the Shaykhīs), it is the differentiation of the "Luminous Reality" of the Imāms from the bare Essence of God, the "complete unknown". As has been pointed out by

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<sup>353</sup> Ibid. 53.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid. 20-21.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid. This is a common motif throughout Nuṣayrī literature. For example, concerning verse 7:172 where God is said to have stated "Am I not your Lord?", the Nuṣayrīs explicitly attribute this "covenant" to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (cf. Halm "Das Buch der Schatten II" 74, "Das Buch der Schatten I" 241).

Amir-Moezzi, it would seem that the only true “extremists” in the eyes of the Imāms were those who did not distinguish, in any way, between the unknowable essence of God and His Manifestation through the Imāms.

### Imāmology in *Al-Kāfī*

The doctrine that the Imām is the only mechanism by which Allāh is known continues in the slightly later work of *Al-Kāfī*, though there is a greater emphasis on the Imām’s cosmogenic role, and the world’s ontological dependence on the Imām. He is, first and foremost, the solution to an apophatic theology that Al-Kulaynī lays out in the chapters preceding his chapter on Imāmah, whose narrations we have discussed above. An example is the following *ḥadīth*.

Imām al-Bāqir said: “We are the face of Allāh, continually passing through your midst. We are the Eye of Allāh in His Creation, and His Open Hand, extended with Mercy to His Servants. He who knows us, knows us; and he who is ignorant of us, is ignorant of us”.<sup>356</sup>

The idea that the Imām is, then, the actual meaning of the Divine Reality, the meaning that the true believer actually worships, is made explicit in the following *ḥadīth* of *al-Kāfī*.

Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq said: Indeed, Allāh created us and formed us, and gave us the most perfect form. He made us His Eye over His Servants, and His Speaking Tongue, through which He speaks to His Servants. We are His Open Hand, extended with Mercy and Kindness to His Servants. We are His Face, through which He is reached, and the Gate which indicates upon Him. We are His reservoir in the heavens and earth. Through us, the trees grow and the fruits are ripened. Through us the rivers flow, and through us the succor of the skies comes down. We plant the grasses of the earth. *Through the worship of us, Allāh is worshipped. If it were not for us, Allāh would not be worshipped.*<sup>357</sup>

The phrase “the worship of us [‘*ibādātunā*’]” is somewhat ambiguous. It could mean the “worship of us” in the sense of the Imāms’ actual acts of worship, or it could mean the *literal* worship of the Imāms. The first meaning would imply that only the Imāms truly worship God; but this seems hardly tenable. The second, however, would seem to indicate some kind of obligation to worship the

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<sup>356</sup> *al-Kāfī* 1:143.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid. 1:144; Aṣ-Ṣādūq Ibid. 156.

*Imāms* themselves, and such worship is seen as completely equivalent to the worship of God. This ambiguity, however, seems to be dispelled by the last sentence of the *ḥadīth* “if it were not for us, Allāh would not be worshipped”, as well as the previous statements where the Imām is posited as the “Face of God” through whom Allāh is reached. This *ḥadīth*, where worship of the Imāms is specifically discussed, is perhaps the most “extreme” of all narrations in the early Imāmī Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* literature, and is closest to the Nuṣayrī and ‘Alawī belief that ‘Alī is the worshipped-meaning underlying the Divine Names. One can note the similarities between the conversation of Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq with Hishām, and the theological formulations of the seminal Nuṣayrī theologian Ḥusayn ibn Hamdan al-Khaṣībī. He writes:

The Divinity has the Greatest Name<sup>358</sup> and the Eternal Meaning. By this I mean that it has a Manifest Aspect, and a Hidden Aspect. ‘Alī is the Eternal meaning. He who worships the Name to the exclusion of the Meaning, then he is a disbeliever, for he has not worshipped anything in reality. And he who worships the Meaning and the Name together, then he is a polytheist. But as for one who worships the Meaning to the exclusion of the Name, then this is the true faith of *tawḥīd*.<sup>359</sup>

It is obvious that, with the exception of the first two lines, the entirety of this teaching is identical to the statements that Imām Ja’far made to Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam, cited above. True worship, then, is seen as worship of ‘Alī. Yet we have seen narrations in *al-Kāfī* where worship of God is identified with worship of the Imām: “by worshipping us, Allāh is worshipped”. It should also be noted that this same phrase occurs in another *ḥadīth* of *al-Kāfī*, which seems to be a shorter version of the previous *ḥadīth*, with a different *isnād*.

Indeed, Allāh created us and formed us, and gave us the most perfect form. He made us His reservoir in the heavens and the earth. The Tree speaks to us.<sup>360</sup> By worshipping us, Allāh the Exalted is worshipped, and without us, Allāh would not be worshipped.<sup>361</sup>

<sup>358</sup> The significance of the Greatest Name will be discussed more below; here it is of importance to remember that many of the early *ghulāh* sects who were associated with magic (such as Bayān or al-Mughīrah) were said to have performed their miraculous feats through the use of the “Greatest Name” of God.

<sup>359</sup> ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Ḥamd 162.

<sup>360</sup> This phrase does not occur in any other *ḥadīths*. Its meaning is not clear at all from the context; it is most likely a reference to the burning bush of Moses.

<sup>361</sup> *Al-Kāfī* 1:193.



The demiurgic role of the Imām is also apparent in the body of narrations that describe the “cosmological need” for the Imām; the Imām is not merely a law-giver, but without him the universe itself would cease to exist. He therefore forms a pivotal part of the Creation, and has been delegated with its maintenance. We read:

Muhammad ibn Sinān narrates: I was with Abū Ja’far II [Imām Muhammad ibn ‘Alī al-Jawād], and I mentioned to him the disputes that the Shī’ah were in. He said: ‘O Abū Muhammad! Indeed, Allāh the Blessed and Exalted does not cease being One in His Attention. He created Muhammad and ‘Alī and Fāṭimah, and then waited a thousand eons; then He created everything else. He showed them the Creation, and enjoined on Creation their obedience. He delegated (*fawwada*) His affair to them. They make permissible whatever they will, and make impermissible whatever they will. And they do not will except as Allāh the Blessed and Exalted wills’.<sup>362</sup>

Imām al-Bāqir said: I swear by Allāh, Allāh took Adam to Himself, He has not abandoned the earth without an Imām through the people are guided to Him. The Imām is the proof of Allāh over the servants, and the earth cannot continue without the proof of Allāh over the servants.<sup>363</sup>

Abū al-Ḥasan [Ar-Riḍā] said: The earth is never free from a Proof, and I swear by Allāh that I am that proof.<sup>364</sup>

If the earth were to be free from the Imām, it would be destroyed.<sup>365</sup>

Muhammad ibn Faḍl said: I asked Abū al-Ḥasan [Ar-Riḍā]: “Can the earth subsist without an Imām?” The Imām said “No”. I then asked: “But we have heard reports from the Ahl al-Bayt saying that the earth is not free of an Imām, except when Allāh the Exalted is angry at the people of the earth or at his servants”. The Imām said: “No, the earth cannot remain [without an Imām]; otherwise, it would be destroyed”.<sup>366</sup>

### Imāmology in the Works of As-Ṣadūq

Though there is a marked decrease in the frequency of narrations regarding mystical Imāmology in the more rationalized works of Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq, and even more so in his student

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid. 1:441.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid. 1:179.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

Shaykh al-Mufid, traces of a mystical Imāmology can still be found. One narration in this regard is the following *ḥadīth*, which occurs in the work *al-Ikhtisās* of al-Mufid, the student of aṣ-Ṣadūq:

‘Alī said: “I am the guide and the guided. I am the father of the orphans, and the husband of the widows and the paupers. I am the shelter of every weak one, and the place of safety for all who fear. I am the one who leads the believers to paradise. I am the first rope of Allāh. I am the firm handhold of Allāh. I am the Eye of Allāh, and His Truthful Tongue. I am His Hand, and His Side, of which a soul will say: ‘Woe upon me for what I neglected at the side of Allāh’. I am the Hand of Allāh, extended to His Servants with Mercy and Forgiveness. I am the gate of humility. He who knows me, and knows my Right, then *he knows his Lord*, because I am the inheritor of His Prophet, His Proof over Creation. No one rejects me, except that he rejects Allāh and His Prophet.”<sup>367</sup>

It is not hard to see how this doctrine, combined with the idea that the Imām is the supreme theophany, leads towards questions and concerns about the Divinity of the Imāms. In reality, one could argue that the supreme function of the Imāms was the result of his spiritual position as the mediator between God and Creation or, more likely, as God *Himself* manifest in human form. This type of speculation is almost totally absent from any of the Imāms before Muḥammad al-Bāqir; as we have seen, some more primitive narrations are attributed to ‘Alī, the reasons for which should be obvious; hardly anything on mystical Imāmology is attributed to the Imāms Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, or ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Abidīn. The role of the Imām as a grand intermediary connection is perhaps best drawn out in the *ḥadīth* on the “Clear Imām”, attributed to the seventh Imām Mūsā al-Kāzim. This sermon appears in Shaykh Aṣ-Ṣadūq’s *Ma’ānī al-Akḥbār* and does not seem to exist in any earlier, existing texts of the Qumm school. Some of the relevant parts of this sermon include:

The Imām makes the permissible of Allāh permissible, and the forbidden of Allāh forbidden. He establishes the limits, and defends the religion of Allāh. He calls to the path of his Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching, through means of the overwhelming proof.

The Imām is like the radiant sun casting its glory to the universe, and he is in the farthest horizons. For no hands can reach him, nor any vision. The Imām is the radiant moon, the manifest lamp, the glowing light, the guiding star in the darkness. He is the wild wilderness and the depths of the seas. He is the sweet water for the thirsty, and the sign of guidance, and the one who saves people from destruction.

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<sup>367</sup> *al-Ikhtisās* 248.

The Imām is the fire on the heights, the heat for the one who seeks warmth, the evidence for the one in destruction, cut off from his lot and so destroyed. The Imām is the rain-cloud, pouring out torrents of rain. The Imām is the radiant sun and the shadowy heavens and the spread out earth. He is the flowing well and the garden.

The Imām is the trustworthy friend, and the loving father, and the dearest brother. The Imām is the shelter of the servants in their trouble. The Imām is the Trustworthy of Allāh in His Creation, and the Proof Allāh upon His Servants, and the Vicegerent of Allāh in his lands. He is the one who calls to Allāh, who protects the sanctuary of Allāh. He is the one purified from all sins and cleansed of every fault. He is the one unique in knowledge, sealed with forbearance. He is the harmony of the religion, the glory of the believers, the rage of the hypocrites, the ruin of the disbelievers.

The Imām is one in his epoch, and no one matches him, and no scholar is his equal. *No replacement can be found for him. None is like him, and none can be compared to him.* He is unique in all bounty, without him having to seek it or earn it. No, he has been blessed by the special gift of the Ennobler, the Giver.

Who can reach any knowledge of Him, and who could possibly decide who the Imām is to be? Never! Never! The minds are boggled, the intellects confused, intelligences thrown into disarray. The eyes grow dim, the glorious are brought low, the wise are perplexed, the noble fall short, the speakers become dumbstruck, reason is struck with wonder. The poets grow weak, and the bards are crippled, and the eloquent are disabled, from ever, ever being able to describe anything about the Imām.

So how, how can anybody describe the Imām? And how can anybody stand in his place? How can anybody do without him?

Never! How could it be? He is like the star between two hands trying to grasp him, when anybody seeks to describe him. So how, how can anybody choose the Imām? Where are the intellects in deciding this? Where can you find anything such as this? Do they think that any such person can be found in anybody other than the Family of the Prophet? Their own souls bear witness that they are liars, and Allāh has left them in misguidance. They have stood upon a dangerous, unsteady foothold, which shakes beneath their feet. They have coveted the station of the Imām with confused, restless and deficient minds, and misguided conjectures. They will gain not increase except distance.<sup>368</sup>

One can see that the Imām is being posited as far more than just a source of guidance, but in some ways being unrepresentable himself. He represents a “rupture” in the space between man and God, where the Divine world intersects with the human. In this way there is something both numinous and nomenous about him, and here he is being described in terms of his transcendence above all else. He is described as being like a star that no one can grasp. It is interesting to observe that this sermon is a response to a very simple question, which is why the people are not given a choice in the Imām. What results is an almost ecstatic praise of the position of the Imām, his glorious stature, and his enormous position both inside and outside of the cosmos.

The idea that the Imām is the mechanism by which God is known is also made in clear in the following speech that the second Imām, Imām Ḥusayn, made to his companions apparently on the eve

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<sup>368</sup> Aṣ-Ṣadūq *Ma‘ānī* 85-103.

of his martyrdom at the battle of Karbala. This short and simple sermon summarizes the Divine status of the Imām, and was included in the work *‘Ilal Ash-Shara’* of Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq:

Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq narrates about his greAt-grandfather, Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī the Martyr, that: "Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī came out to his companions. He called out: ‘O people, indeed Allāh – May His Mention be Glorified – did not create the Servants except that they would know Him, and if they know him they will worship Him, and to be content through worshipping Him and no one else.’ A man said to him: ‘O son of the Prophet, my mother and father be sacrificed for you. What is the knowledge of Allāh?’ To which Imām Ḥusayn, the Prince of Martyrs, said: “The knowledge the people every time will have of their Imām, the Imām for whom obedience has been ordered.”<sup>369</sup>

Oddly enough, *‘Ilal ash-Sharā’* is one of the more esoteric works of Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq, even though its title (“The Causes of Laws”) would cause one to suspect that it is going to be a legal treatise. While much of it is, the first portion does not deal with laws at all, but deals with questions of why the Imāms exist, why they have the names they have, and so forth. The following narration, where the Imām is assigned a cosmogenic role, occurs in Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq’s *‘Ilal Ash-Shara’*.

Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Ju’fi asked Imām al-Bāqir: ‘What reason do people always need the Prophet and Imāms?’ To which he said: “In order to sustain the universe in its proper way. This is because Allāh the Glorified and Exalted has lifted the punishment up from the people of the earth so long as there is a Prophet or Imām amongst them. And so Allāh the Glorified and Exalted has said: ‘Allāh will not punish a people while you are amongst them.’ And the Prophet said: ‘The stars are the safeguard for the people of the heavens, and my Ahl al-Bayt are the safeguard for the people of the earth. If the stars were to leave, the people of the heavens would have to face that which they would hate. And if my Ahl al-Bayt were to leave the earth, the people of the earth would have to face that which they hate.’”

Imām al-Bāqir then said: ‘He meant by ‘My Ahl al-Bayt’ the Imāms which Allāh has ordered the people to obey. And so Allāh has said: ‘Obey Allāh and obey the Prophet and the holders of authority from amongst you.’ And they are the infallible ones who do not sin and do not disobey God. “They are the ones assisted, supported, and guided by God. Through them, Allāh sustains his servant, and through them the lands are settled, and through them the rain comes from the sky, and through them the blessings pour forth from the earth. Through them, the people of disobedience are given respite, and the punishment and torment is not hastened towards them. The Holy Spirit does not separate from them, nor do they separate from him. The Qur’ān does not separate from them, nor do they separate from them. Blessings of Allāh be upon them.”<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Aṣ-Ṣadūq *Tawḥīd* 1:19.

<sup>370</sup> Aṣ-Ṣadūq *‘Ilal* 1:150.

### Imāmology and Epistemology: The Imām as Source of all Knowledge

Within the Qummī *ḥadīth* literature, it would seem that the function of the Imām as explicator of the Divine Law is linked to his “Divine function” as God’s greatest sign. Throughout early *ḥadīth* books like *al-Kāfī*, we see one theme continually emphasized: all knowledge (*‘ilm*) must be derived from the Imām.<sup>371</sup> The true *‘ālim* (scholar, learned one) was always the Imām, and even the earliest Shī‘ah considered him the fount of all religious knowledge.<sup>372</sup> This is not merely a matter of religious obligation to study only at the feet of the Imām. It is based on a much higher ideal of Imāmah, where the only people who truly possess any knowledge will be the Imāms and their devoted followers. In fact, a body of *ḥadīths* argues that anywhere in the Qur’ān where the *‘ulamā’* (people of knowledge) are referred to, in fact is speaking only about the Imāms and their true followers. The attempt to derive knowledge from any other source, then, is seen as a doomed project. For example, one important verse of the Qur’ān is where God speaks about the “decisive” (*muḥkimaṭ*) and “ambiguous” verses, and says of the latter that “only those who are firm in knowledge (*rāsikhūn*) know their interpretation (*ta’wīl*)”. In a number of narrations, the Imāms state explicitly that they are those firm in knowledge, the ones who are endowed with the knowledge of interpretation. Three such narrations appear in *al-Kāfī*:

Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq said: “We are those firm in knowledge, and we are those who know the *ta’wīl*”.<sup>373</sup>

Concerning Allāh the Exalted and Glorified’s Statement: “None knows its *ta’wīl* except those firm in knowledge”, the Imām said: ‘The Prophet of Allāh was greatest of those firm in knowledge, and Allāh the Exalted and Glorified taught him the entirety of what he revealed, and the entirety of the *ta’wīl*. Indeed, Allāh did not send anything down of which He did not teach its *ta’wīl*. The successors of the Prophet who come after him know the entirety of the *ta’wīl* as well. As for those who do not know its *ta’wīl*, if one endowed with knowledge comes and speaks with such knowledge, Allāh tells them to say: “They say we believe in all of it, all of it is from our Lord”. The Qur’ān has particular verses and general versus and decisive verses and ambiguous verses and abrogating verses and abrogated verses, and those who are steadfast in knowledge know it all.”<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> *al-Kāfī* 1:180-190.

<sup>372</sup> Arjomand “Crisis” 497.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid. 1:213.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq said: Those who are firm in knowledge are the Prince of Believers [‘Alī] and the Imāms after him, peace be upon them.<sup>375</sup>

Here, it suffices to say that the Imām is seen as far more than a mere explicator of Law; in a sense he *is* the Law itself, its very embodiment. To attempt to do without him and follow one’s own, fallible opinion becomes equated with abandoning the Law itself. Once the pontifical status of the Imām is accepted, higher speculation about his Divinity will naturally begin, since it is already posited that God cannot be known except through him. One could argue that, within the doctrines of Imāmāh, the seeds of deification can be found. One could also argue that the legal functions of the Imām are merely an extension of his “cosmic” function.<sup>376</sup>

The idea that the Imām of the time is the only connection between humanity and God is not something that is unique to the Shī‘ah *ḥadīth* literature, though certainly it is there that the theme is developed and expounded to its greatest extent. The specific belief that ‘Alī was in possession of a special source of knowledge that dwarfed all of the other companions of the Prophet, as well as the idea that true knowledge could only be obtained from him, exists throughout the Sunnī *ḥadīth* literature. The most famous *ḥadīth* in this regard is the Prophet’s statement: “I am the City of Knowledge, and ‘Alī is its gate”, which can be found in at least 50 Sunnī *ḥadīth* books, including the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of At-Tirmidhi and the *Musnad* of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, and is even cited in al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm ad-Dīn*.<sup>377</sup> Momen argues that the authenticity of the *ḥadīth* has never been seriously open to question;<sup>378</sup> and the language of the *ḥadīth* indicates something more than mere temporal or judicial authority. But again, we seem to be dealing with a fundamentally epistemological question: how God, how the Law, how anything of the true faith is to be known; the *ghulāh* adoration of the Imāms seems to be the way that these questions were answered by the Qumm school and their successors.

In reality, it could easily be argued that the body of narrations that argue that the Imām is the “Light of Allāh”, that they are the ones “firm in knowledge”, that nobody’s faith is complete without their *walāyah*, and so forth, are only an extension of the basic idea that the Prophet is “the city of knowledge, and ‘Alī is its gate”. The early Imāmological *ḥadīth* literature, then, would merely be a commentary on this basic idea, and seeks to answer the questions: why is ‘Alī the gate? What is

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 43.

<sup>377</sup> Shirazī 438-444.

<sup>378</sup> Momen 14.

the meaning of “gate” in this context? And, most importantly: how does one enter through the gate, in order to gain true knowledge? All of these narrations posit some kind of ambiguity between God and His Manifestation in the form of the Imām.

Other Nuṣayrī interpretations of the Trinity, however, are even closer to what exists in Imāmī *ḥadīth* books like *al-Kāfī*. There, God “Himself” is identified with the Meaning while ‘Alī is identified with the supreme Name, “who is beyond any other name and prevalent over every name”.<sup>379</sup> This idea is explicated in the Nuṣayrī work *Kitāb al-Uṣūṣ*, which seems to have been written in the twelfth or early thirteenth century.<sup>380</sup> But it is not hard to see how the more standard Nuṣayrī idea that ‘Alī himself is the Meaning could be extrapolated from this body of narrations, since the worship of God is linked directly with knowledge and love of the Imām. There are a number of *ḥadīths* in this regard. As such, knowledge of God is specifically equated with that of the Imām, and vice-versa. It is not surprising, then, that later groups like the Nuṣayrīs would begin to explicitly assert that the Imāms were, in fact, God. While many would dismiss such an idea as the most aberrant example of extremism, the idea that the Imāms are “the most Beautiful Names of God”, that without “knowledge” of the Imām one’s religious work is invalid, and that without the Imām God would not be worshipped, threaten to collapse the neat distinction between the Imām and God that lies at the basis of orthodox Shī‘ism.

### Narrations in Praise of Fātimah

Up until now, we have discussed the *ḥadīths* in praise of the Imāms. However, the heavy importance that is placed upon the Imāms as spiritual guides should not allow one to forget about the special praise that is given to Fātimah, the daughter of the Prophet, within the early Imāmī Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* literature. The realm of the “esoteric feminine” has formed a critical part of Sufism,<sup>381</sup> though it is largely ignored within “mainstream” Shī‘ism. The role of women within Shī‘ah spirituality has been either completely ignored, or reduced to a purely political function;<sup>382</sup> The teaching that, above and beyond the Imāms there is a kind of feminine aspect of the Divine, manifest in the form of

<sup>379</sup> Qtd. in Bar-Asher and Kofsky 51.

<sup>380</sup> Bar-Asher and Kofsky 49.

<sup>381</sup> See, for example, Corbin *Alone* 157-175.

<sup>382</sup> Such as the women’s “Zaynab Commandos” of the Iranian revolution. See Reeves 22-23, 126-128.

Fāṭimah, can be found haphazardly scattered through early Imāmī books of *ḥadīth*. In some *ḥadīths*, the position of Fāṭimah is seemingly even *higher* than that given to the Imāms. Traditionally, Shī'ahs have understood the "proofs of Allāh" to be the Prophet and the Twelve Imāms who follow after him. It is the Imāms who are entitled to both temporal and political rule, and it is they who explicate and preserve the law and doctrine of Islam. But one of the most important themes in Shī'ism is that of the *Fourteen Infallibles*, which includes the Prophet's daughter Fāṭimah. But one may be tempted to ask: since she is not an Imām, what role does her infallibility serve?

Based upon the *ḥadīth* literature, it would seem that her infallibility actually serves quite a high purpose, even though she is not specifically tasked with being the custodian of the Divine Law. Unfortunately, the full explication of her cosmic position is dealt with very elusively in the early corpus of the Imāms. The *ḥadīths* on the subject are not as numerous as those dealing with the mystical functions of the Imāms, especially 'Alī. But one should not assume that this means her position as an Infallible is of less importance than that of the Prophet or Imāms. Rather, it seems that the "bounties" (*faḍā'il*) of Fāṭimah are simply *indescribable*, and lie beyond the realms of normal discourse. There are a number of *ḥadīths* that are actually quite explicit in this regard. The most striking *ḥadīth* in this regard is the following narration of the Eleventh Imām, Ḥasan al-'Askarī. This narration, indeed, casts our previous discussion into an entirely different light. We have seen how the Imāms are posited as the ultimate horizon of knowledge; they are the gatekeepers to the transcendent knowledge of God (*al-ma'rifat bi Allāh*), and it would seem that they hold all the keys. And yet, it seems that Fāṭimah "the Radiant" (*Az-Zahra*) exists in a state that is, in some ways at least, even more transcendent than that of the male Imāms. The following *ḥadīth* is cited in the *Tafsīr Atyab al-Bayān*, where Imām al-'Askari says:

We are the proofs of Allāh upon Creation. But our grandmother, Fāṭimah, *is the proof of Allāh over us*.<sup>383</sup>

Once again, it would seem that the Imāms have come to "upset the balance" of what was traditionally known and accepted by the Shī'ahs. If the Imām is the supreme limit of knowledge, and if he is the *ḥujjat* of Allāh upon Creation, then what can be said about the being who is the *ḥujjat* over the *ḥujjat*? It is perhaps, for this reason, that we find that the early *ḥadīth* literature does not include

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<sup>383</sup>Qtd. in al-Mas'ūdī 69.



long discourses about the position and status of Fāṭimah in the way that it does about ‘Alī, the Prophet, or the other Imāms. There seems to be an idea that she simply lies beyond the horizon of any knowledge, even that which can be achieved by the true believer who knows his Imām.

This theme has become an important part of Nuṣayrī theology and liturgy. The Nuṣayrīs, as well as many other ‘Alawī sects are fond of referring to Fāṭimah by the masculine term *al-Fatir*, which literally means the “Creator”,<sup>384</sup> she is seen as being the creator of all mankind, and perhaps even the entire physical cosmos universe.<sup>385</sup> This belief does not contradict the demiurgic beliefs concerning the Prophet or ‘Alī; in fact, she is viewed as being the “inner essence” of the Prophet, his “mystery”. Even though she is seen to be not truly feminine in the biological (she is, of course, Divine, and the Divine reality admits of no gender; here femininity is viewed as merely *docetic*),<sup>386</sup> there is no doubt that the common cultural perception of women being “mysterious” plays a part in the theology of Fāṭimah’s nominal nature, and perhaps her docetic femininity serves only to reflect the belief that she manifests the mystery, inner essence of the Prophet.<sup>387</sup> They are seen to represent two aspects of the Divine name, the *ism*. It would be correct to say, then, that the Nuṣayrī trinity does *not* consist of the triad ‘Alī (the meaning, *al-ma’nā*), Muḥammad (the name, *al-ism*), and Salmān (the gate, *al-bāb*), but rather ‘Alī, *Muḥammad/Fāṭimah*, and Salmān, with the dyad Muḥammad/Fāṭimah representing the male and female aspects of the Divinity veiled/revealed through and indicated by the epiphanic Name.<sup>388</sup>

Much of this speculation is related to her unique position as the Prophet’s daughter, the wife of the First Imām, and the mother of the remaining eleven Imāms. For this reason, a later body of literature often refers to her as “the confluence of the two Lights” (*majma’ An-nūrayn*), the place where the Light of Prophecy and the Light of Sainthood intersect and meet.<sup>389</sup> The terminology of “the confluence of the two Lights” would indicate a tertiary position for Fāṭimah, after her father and husband, which would be in keeping with more “orthodox” understandings of the “bounties” related to the Prophet and his family. Another body of *ḥadīths* would call this style of thinking into question.

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<sup>384</sup> Nimier 18.

<sup>385</sup> Moosa 355-356.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid.

<sup>387</sup> Bar-Asher and Kofsky 144-145.

<sup>388</sup> Cf. Ibid 146.

<sup>389</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 25.

Another more well known narration places her in a *primary* position beyond the Prophet and ‘Alī. It is a *ḥadīth qudsī*, a narration where God speaks in the first person through the Prophet.

○ Muḥammad! If it were not for you, I would not have created the stars. And if it were not for ‘Alī, I would not have created you. And if it were not for Fātimah, I would not have created either of you.<sup>390</sup>

Another narration plays upon a similar theme:

The Prophethood of any Prophet is not complete until he commits himself to her bounty and to the love of her; indeed, she is the most truthful one.<sup>391</sup>

There have been many attempts to explain this narration, without abandoning the primacy of the Prophet and other Imāms. The traditional explanation, which can be found in books such as *al-Asrār al-Fāṭimiyyah* of Muḥammad Fāḍil Mas’ūdī, runs as follows: the universe has been created with a specific purpose, namely that humanity should be able to know and worship God. This purpose cannot be fulfilled without the coming of a Prophet, and so this serves to explain the first part of the narration: if it were not for the Prophet, there would have been no *value* in creating the cosmos. Similarly, there would be no value in sending a Prophet without sending an Imām to establish the religion after him. Here, Imāmah seems to be understood in its primarily legal and doctrinal function, instead of the cosmogenic functions referred to above. Following upon this, it is said that there is no point in sending an Imām and then not sending another Imām after him to establish the Law. For this reason, the creation of the Prophet or ‘Alī would be without purpose if it were not for Fātimah, who would be the mother of the Imāms that came after ‘Alī.<sup>392</sup>

The patriarchal and legalistic overtones of this interpretation are fairly obvious. Firstly, even though there seems to be a kind of cosmic primacy attributed to Fātimah in the previous *ḥadīths*, these interpretations seek to downplay that, and basically explain them away. They also deal with the issue of prophethood and sainthood (*walāyah*) in purely rational terms: the main issue is the question of legal guidance. In a certain sense, these explanations are very reductive, and fit in with the legalistic interpretations of Imāmah given by the early ‘*ulamā*’, discussed above: the only real purpose

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<sup>390</sup> Qtd. in al-Mas’ūdī 231.

<sup>391</sup> Qtd. in Ibid. 147.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid 231-242.

in the Prophet and his family is to make known the Law, so that human beings may be able to worship God “properly”. This is the legal reductivism present in these arguments. The patriarchal elements are there as well, however. Fāṭimah’s position is subordinated to the function of her male counterparts, while not actually being included in it. According to this interpretation, her only function is to give birth to the Imāms, and it would seem that she has no other function beyond that. This way of thinking does not seem to fit in with the idea of herself being the “Proof of God” over the Imāms, or the idea that prophethood is contingent upon accepting her high status as well as an attitude of spiritual devotion towards her.

Another set of *ḥadīths* approach the issue of Fatima’s transcendence from the standpoint of her well-known appellation, “the Radiant” (*Zahrā*). The idea presented here is, rather than a kind of dark Unknowability (which would seem to be properly applied to God as such (cf. the idea of the “black Light” of the Divine Essence described by Corbin in his *Man of Light*<sup>393</sup>), is the idea of a blinding light, too luminous to be perceived. We have seen how this idea was explored in the Nuṣayrī dyad of the Meaning and the Name; the Meaning veils itself in the Name, owing to its extreme luminosity (rather than darkness). Fāṭimah, we have seen, is described as the inner “mystery” of the Prophet, and so in a sense she is veiled in him as well. Importantly enough, the following *ḥadīth* is narrated by Jābir al-Ju’fī:

I said to Abū ‘Abdillāh [aṣ-Ṣādiq]: “Why is Fāṭimah the Radiant named the Radiant?” The Imām replied: Because Allāh the Mighty and Glorified created her from the Light of His Glory. When she radiated (*ishraqat*), she illuminated the heavens and the earth with her light. The vision of the angels were *overwhelmed*, and they collapsed before Allāh in prostration. They said: “Our God and Master, what is this Light?” And so Allāh revealed to them: “This Light is from my Light, and I bring it to repose in my Heavens. I created it from my Glory, and will draw it out from the greatest Prophet of my prophets. From this, I will draw forth the Light of the Imāms who will rise with my command, who will guide to my Truth, and whom I will make my representative to the earth once my revelation is complete.”<sup>394</sup>

This Light does not seem to be something that is purely perceptible through a mystical faculty. There are other *ḥadīths* that describe the physical manifestation of this Light in the temporal world, and these narrations form part of the larger body of *ḥadīths* dealing with the miracles of the Imām.

<sup>393</sup> Corbin *Man of Light* 100.

<sup>394</sup> Aṣ-Ṣādūq *‘Ilal* 1:213-214.

Amarah said: "I asked Aba 'Abdillāh about Fāṭimah, and why she was referred to as "the Radiant". He said: "When she would stand to pray in her *miḥrāb* [alcove], her Light would radiate to the people of heaven, just as the light of the stars radiates to the people of the earth".<sup>395</sup>

Abān ibn Tagalub asked Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq: "Why is the Radiant one referred to as such?" He said: "Because there were three instances where, during the day, she became radiant with Light before the Prince of Believers ['Alī]. The light of her face became radiant during the morning prayer. The people were asleep, and the *whiteness* of this Light penetrated into their homes in Madīnah, turning their walls to white. They were shocked by this, and so they went to the Prophet and asked him about what they saw. And so he sent them to the house of Fāṭimah where they saw her fixed in her *miḥrāb*, praying. The Light radiated from her *miḥrāb* as well as her face. And so they learned that, what they had seen, was from the Light of the face of Fāṭimah.

"Later on, at noon-time, and she was preparing for the prayer, her face radiated a *yellow* light, and the Light penetrated the homes of the people, turning their clothes and their own selves to yellow. And so they went to the Prophet and asked about what they had seen, and so he sent them to the house of Fāṭimah. And they saw her in her *miḥrāb*, and her face was radiant with yellow light. And so they learned that, what they had seen, was the light of the face of Fāṭimah.

"When the day ended, and the sun had set, the face of Fāṭimah radiated *red*, out of joy and thanks to Allāh the Glorified and Exalted. The Light entered the homes of the people and turned their walls red, and they were stunned by this. And so they went to the home of the Prophet to ask him about what they had seen, and so he sent them to the house of Fāṭimah. And they saw her sitting in her *miḥrāb*, glorifying and praising Allāh, and her face was radiant with red light. And so they learned that what they had seen, was from the Light of the face of Fāṭimah. This Light did not pass from her until the birth of Imām al-Ḥusayn, and this Light radiates from color to color in our faces until the Day of Rising, passing from Imām to Imām".<sup>396</sup>

A careful reading of this *ḥadīth* might shed some light on the *ḥadīth* of Imām al-'Askari, discussed above. The Imāms are described as being the repositories of this Light, rather than the origins, indicating some kind of causal or cosmic primacy in the figure of Imāmāh. In addition to the eleven Imāms after 'Alī being his inheritors, as well as inheritors of the Prophet, they also seem to be the inheritors of Fāṭimah, who holds a position over and above them (though not, necessarily, over 'Alī or the Prophet). This would, once again, seem to belie the more moderate interpretation of Fāṭimah, where she is reduced to the purely biological function of mothering the Imāms. This particular narration, then, can be read in the light of the statement that "our mother Fāṭimah is the Proof of God over us". Rather than the Imāms taking precedence over Fāṭimah, their own light

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<sup>395</sup> Ibid. 215.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

derives from hers, and the implication is that the *Imāms* come to know God through their mother Fāṭimah.

It could be argued that this discussion only applies towards the eleven Imāms of whom Fāṭimah is the mother; but the Prophet and ‘Alī would still maintain their superiority, and so Fāṭimah would not be the *ḥujjat Allāh* for them. The *ḥadīth* of Imām al-‘Askari would tend towards this interpretation: he does say our *mother*, and so it would seem that he is only speaking on behalf of the eleven Imāms from Fāṭimah’s progeny. However, it could be argued that the phrase “our mother” is meant in a more mystical sense than first glimpse would presume. Here, one should make note of the number of *ḥadīths* where the Prophet refers to Fāṭimah as “the mother of her father”.<sup>397</sup> This specific appellation would become another famous title for Fāṭimah, though the early Imāmī Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* literature seems to be silent in explaining this terminology. Once again, contemporary Shī‘ah ‘ulamā’ who have dealt with this subject explain this appellation in the same way they interpret the *ḥadīth*: “If it were not for Fāṭimah, I would not have created either of you”. Fāṭimah is the “mother of her father” in so far as he would not have been created if she were not there to perpetuate his progeny. But the *ḥadīth* literature would tend towards another idea: namely, that Fāṭimah was in possession of a special “secret” from God that was not given directly to the remaining Imāms. More important, however, than the “mother of her father” narrations are those that deal with Fāṭimah’s power to impart knowledge to the Imāms, including her own husband ‘Alī. As discussed, there are a number of *ḥadīths* where the Imāms are posited to hold the “true Qur’ān”, with both its esoteric and exoteric aspects, as well as being in possession of all the previous revelations. The early *ḥadīth* literature refers to other texts that are specific to the Imāms. This includes a specific text called the *Mashaf al-Fāṭimah*, the “manuscript of Fāṭimah”. Abū Baṣīr narrates asked Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq about it, to which he said:

It is a manuscript, three times of the length of your Qur’ān. And yet not a single letter is in it from your Qur’ān.<sup>398</sup>

This narration fits in with the overall idea about *tahrīf* in the Qur’ān, discussed above. The Imām’s use of the words “your Qur’ān” would seem to indicate this, indicating once again that the Imāms taught that they are in possession of a special set of Scriptures known only to them. Another

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<sup>397</sup> al-Mas’ūdī 271.

<sup>398</sup> al-Kāfī 1:239.

*ḥadīth* of Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq sheds light on what the manuscript of Fāṭimah actually is: a text that portends the events of the future. One of Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq's companions, Fudail ibn Sakrah, came to him once, and the Imām is narrated to have said:

"O Fudail! Do you know what I was looking at before?" Fudail said no. The Imām continued: "I was looking into the Book of Fāṭimah. Indeed, there is no king who will ever take possession [of the earth] except that his name and his father's name are written in it".<sup>399</sup>

Ḥammād ibn 'Uthmān narrates:

I heard Abū 'Abdillāh [aṣ-Ṣādiq] saying: "The atheists will become manifest in the year 128, and this I have seen written in the manuscript of Fāṭimah". Hamad asked: "And what is the manuscript of Fāṭimah?" The Imām said: "Indeed, when Allāh took his Prophet, Fāṭimah was overtaken by the most intense grief at his death, so intense that only Allāh the Exalted and Glorified can reckon it. And so Allāh sent an angel to her, who consoled her and spoke to her. She went in fear to the Prince of Believers, who said: 'I sensed something of this and heard the voice. Tell me everything that he said'. And so she *taught* him everything that was said, and the Prince of Believers wrote everything down that he heard, until he completed a manuscript". The Imām then said: "There is nothing in it concerning the *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*; what is in it is the knowledge of all that is and all that will be".<sup>400</sup>

This *ḥadīth* is very interesting in light of the idea that Fāṭimah represents the "esoteric of the esoteric". Firstly, we see that she is herself instructing 'Alī about all that it is in there, and that he dutifully took down what amounts to a personal revelation given to her directly. Secondly, however, we see that Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq has made note of the fact that the manuscript of Fāṭimah has nothing to do with matters of Law: "there is nothing in it concerning the *ḥalāl* and *ḥaram*". Perhaps this is because Fāṭimah herself is not charged with overseeing the implementation and explication of the Law; but here this does not seem to mean that she is in an inferior position to the Imāms, but perhaps even beyond it. 'Alī, being the "Imām of the time" during his era, was believed to be the *khalīfah* of the Prophet and entitled to temporal and spiritual rule. Yet when it comes to the knowledge of "all that is and all that will be", he obtains this knowledge from her. The same applies to Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq's own ability to know future events: his knowledge of this is derived from reading the manuscript of Fāṭimah, and so once again we see the Imāms taking esoteric knowledge directly from her.

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<sup>399</sup> Ibid. 1:242.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid. 1:240.

The cosmogenic significance of Fāṭimah is important with regards to another one of Fāṭimah's titles, which is Fāṭimah al-Fāṭir. Once again, this is dealt with only elusively in the *ḥadīth* literature, and it remained for much later mystics and Sufis to attempt to elucidate what this meant in practice. An Imāmī *ḥadīth* that is instructive in this regards also occurs in Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq's *ʿIlal*. Amir-Moezzi cites this *ḥadīth* in his Divine Guide, saying:

According to one *ḥadīth*, when Adam was brought to life by the breath of God, he lifted his eyes toward the Throne and saw five inscriptions; asking God about this, he received the following reply: "First there is Muḥammad, for I am *al-maḥmūd* (The Praised One); second, there is 'Alī, for I am *al-'Alī* (The Most High); third, there is Fāṭimah, for I am *al-fāṭir* (The Creator); fourth, there is al-Ḥasan, for I am *al-muḥsin* (The Benefactor); fifth, there is al-Ḥusayn, for I am *dhū al-iḥsān* (The Lord of Kindness)".

It is interesting that the creative function of God is identified with that of Fāṭimah, rather than any of the other Imāms. As we have seen, in some of 'Alī's sermons he refers to himself directly as the Creator and destroyer of the heavens and earth, but here it is Fāṭimah who is presented as the locus of manifestation for God's Creative power. Corbin quotes another startling *ḥadīth* in this regard. It involves a story that is almost identical to the "childhood gospels" of Jesus, where Jesus was seen to astonish the rabbis who were sent to teach him.<sup>401</sup> This *ḥadīth* involves Imām al-Bāqir and his teacher 'Abdallāh Sabbah (not to be confused with 'Abdallāh Ibn Sabā), who was instructing him with regards to the esoteric interpretation of letters (*jafī*). Then, it is said that the young Imām al-Bāqir became suddenly transfigured. Sabbah saw a radiant version of the Prophet, who said: "I am the pure Lord, transcending all attributes and all description". The radiant form then passed into that of 'Alī, and that of *Fāṭimah*. She then said: "There is no God beside *me*, neither in divinity nor humanity, neither in the Heavens nor on earth, outside of me, who am Fāṭimah-Creator [Fatima-Fatir], it is I who created the spirit of the True Believers".<sup>402</sup> This type of ecstatic utterance does not appear in the *ḥadīth* literature; yet the difference between it and all the narrations where Fāṭimah is portrayed as a demiurge is really only a matter of degree.

It is also interesting to note that the "power of Fāṭimah" seems to have been a part of early *ghulāḥ* groups. As referred to in the second chapter, al-'Asharī castigates Bayān ibn Sa'man for

<sup>401</sup> Luke 2:42-52.

<sup>402</sup> Corbin *Cyclical* 146.

claiming that he was able to call upon Venus, and that Venus would respond to him.<sup>403</sup> The exact meaning of Venus's response remains unclear, unfortunately; but the Arabic word for Venus (*zuhrah*) is hardly distinguishable from Fatima's most famous title, the Radiant (*zahra*). Given the great deal of confusion that seems present in al-'Ashari's work, it is entirely possible that Bayan was claiming some type of magical power to call upon Fātimah, rather than the specific planet Venus. It is also possible that the two are regarded as somehow one and the same, in the same way that many Nuṣayrīs believe that the sun is regarded as a locus of manifestation for 'Alī, and so take the sun as their *qiblah*. The inter-relationship between the stars and the Ahl al-Bayt is referred to in a number of *ḥadīths*. We have already seen how, in al-Majlisi's *Ḥayāt al-Qulūb*, Fātimah is seen to be the creator of the heavens and earth.

Beyond this, we can see that the idea of Fātimah's personal transcendence (as opposed to her merely being a biological tool to propagate the eleven Imāms after 'Alī) is developed in a number of earlier narrations in the Shī'ah *ḥadīth* literature. Interestingly, some of the most significant are to be found in Shaykh Aṣ-Ṣadūq's *ʿIlal Ash-Sharāʿī*, rather than *al-Kāfī*. The first set of *ḥadīths* deals with the etymology of her name. Linguistically, the root f-t-m refers to weaning, such as when a child is weaned from its mother, or to be cut off from something. There are a number of *ḥadīths* which build upon the meaning of this root to explain her name, including:

Fātimah was named Fātimah, because the universe has been cut off from having any true knowledge of her.<sup>404</sup>

The "noumenal" status of Fātimah is highlighted in this particular narration, and may help to explain why much more of the early *ḥadīth* literature is devoted to the praise of the Imāms and there is far less devoted to Fātimah herself. The idea that is presented here, and in other narrations of a similar nature, is that Fātimah's specific bounties are beyond the realm of human discourse.

A number of other *ḥadīths* also deal with this "noumenal" aspect of Fātimah. We have seen that, in some of the sermons of 'Alī, there is the use of a certain language which compares the Imāms to certain verses of the Qur'ān. *Khutbat al-Bayān* is replete with such references. This teaching fits into a larger present amongst the Shī'ahs, where every verse of the Qur'ān is seen as referring to the

<sup>403</sup> See introduction.

<sup>404</sup> Qtd. in al-Mas'ūdf 369.



Ahl al-Bayt in some form or another. Fāṭimah is no exception; and the specific set of verses that are said to be “about” her are those of *Surat al-Qadr*. This *surah* reads:

Indeed, we revealed it in the Night of Power. And how could you reckon what the Night of Power is? The Night of Power is better than a thousand nights. The angels and the Spirit descend within it by the permission of their Lord, and they come with every command. Peace! Until the break of dawn.<sup>405</sup>

The esoteric interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of this verse, as given in many *ḥadīths*, is that it refers to Fāṭimah. There are many facets to this commentary, but the most important aspect is how it relates to the lines: “And how could you comprehend the Night of Power?” The idea that the Night of Power (the night in which the Qur’ān was first revealed) is beyond the grasp of human beings seems to be the implication of the rhetorical language used here. With regards to Fāṭimah, the same Unknowability prevails. This is referred to in another *ḥadīth*, which uses similar language as one cited above, but with the added connection to the Night of Power:

He who truly understands the Night of Power, then he has truly understood Fāṭimah. Yet she is named Fāṭimah because the creation has been weaned from having any knowledge of her.<sup>406</sup>

The implication in this narration is clear: both the Night of Power and Fāṭimah are ultimately unknowable in their true reality. There seems, then, to be an alternation between two themes related to the praise of Fāṭimah in the *ḥadīth* literature: one is the idea of darkness, which seems to be symbolized by the Night of Power. The other is the idea of Light, a Light that is too bright to ever be truly perceived. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the Imāms and early Imāmī Shī‘ites preferred the title Fāṭimah the Radiant, since this title appears to balance two facets of their teachings concerning her.

From this brief study, we can see that “extreme” ideas about Fāṭimah were definitely present and circulating during the time of the Imāms. One should read these narrations in light of all that has been discussed in the previous section about the “Luminosity” of the Imāms and their special mystical knowledge. Fāṭimah is presented as also being a “radiant” being of extreme luminosity, so much so

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<sup>405</sup> 97:1-5.

<sup>406</sup> Cf. Al-Mas’ūdī 369-375.

that nobody can truly reach a proper understanding of her. She is seen to be the “proof of Allāh” over the Imāms themselves. One of the important powers of the Imāms, the ability to see into the future, is derived from their study of her “Book”, a book that was revealed to her by an angel. Unfortunately, this set of teachings was suppressed by the gradual rationalization of Shī‘ism. We do not see this teaching becoming prominent amongst the Shī‘ah jurisprudents whose discourse would dominate Imāmī Shī‘ism until the Safavid era. Once this topic was taken up again in later periods, Fāṭimah’s position was subordinated to that of the Imāms and their lawgiving function, and the *ḥadīths* that we have discussed in this section are merely explained away.

#### Extremist “Love Martyrs”: Dying for Recognizing the Imām

We have discussed the ambiguities which run throughout the *ḥadīth* literature, where Divinity seems to be simultaneously denied and affirmed when it comes to defining the status and function of the Imām. But there is also a great ambiguity in some of the stories passed down where the Imāms, especially ‘Alī, are seen to have cursed or even executed those who proclaimed their Divinity. The story of Nuṣayr<sup>407</sup> is interesting in this regard; it has become an important part of the Ahl-i Ḥaqq sect in Iran, but it is also included in the Allamah al-Majlisī’s (the author of *Biḥār al-Anwār*) *Ḥayāt al-Qulūb*. It is said that Nuṣayr was one of the companions of ‘Alī, and fought alongside of him in the conquest of Khaybar. Nuṣayr died in the battle, and his mother was stricken with grief. She begged ‘Alī to bring him back to life, to which ‘Alī agreed. Upon being revived from the dead, Nuṣayr said: “Indeed, I see that you are God”. ‘Alī is then said to have killed Nuṣayr for uttering such blasphemies; and yet ‘Alī then brought Nuṣayr back to life again, and demanded that Nuṣayr repent. It is said that ‘Alī continued to cut him down and bring him back to life, and continued to demand repentance. Nuṣayr would not repent. Finally, it is said that God called out to ‘Alī from heaven. He said that there was no God but He, and that He was the Creator and Master of the heavens and the earth. God then said to ‘Alī: “Never mind this time; I will be the God of all the world, and you will be the God of Nuṣayr”. And so ‘Alī spared Nuṣayr’s life, and sent him back to his mother.<sup>408</sup>

The story is enigmatic for a number of reasons. Many Nuṣayris and ‘Alawis have argued with

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<sup>407</sup> This is not the same Nuṣayr from whom the Nuṣayris take their lineage. That Nuṣayr (who is actually Ibn Nuṣayr) was a disciple of the tenth and eleven Imāms.

<sup>408</sup> Moosa 186.

Imāmī Shī'ahs: if 'Alī killed Nuṣayr because he had become an apostate (*murtad*), an extremist (*ghāfī*), and a polytheist (*mushrik*), then why did 'Alī bring him back to life? This question does not seem to be answered by the *ḥadīth*, and in any case there seems to be an explicit acknowledgment on God's part that 'Alī was, in fact, God. In their turn, many 'Alawīs have argued that the killing of Nuṣayr was merely a test of Nuṣayr's faith: would he recant his true belief that 'Alī was God if threatened with death? The fact that he withstood the sword seven times (and, in some narrations, seventy times) is seen to indicate his true faith in the Divinity of 'Alī. One must also ask: if Nuṣayr believed that 'Alī was God, then why did he not turn back from this belief when 'Alī denied any Divinity for himself? This kind of literary tension appears to be an important part of the story.

This type of story occurs throughout the *ḥadīth* literature: disciples are themselves rebuked by the Imāms for deifying 'Alī and his successors, and yet these disciples refuse to recant. It used to be common-place to argue that this was originally formulated by the mysterious 'Abdallāh ibn Saba, who is said to have been a Jewish convert from Yemen who lived during the time of the Prophet and 'Alī.<sup>409</sup> It is said that he is the first openly to have espoused the belief that the Imāms were the Incarnation of God, saying to 'Alī "You are, you are", supposedly meaning that he was telling 'Alī that he was God. For this, it is said that he was banished by 'Alī himself, and that 'Alī executed several of his followers. Once again, we see "extremist" Shī'ahs being threatened with death by the very people they deified, and yet refusing to back down. One *ḥadīth* where 'Alī is said to have executed Ibn Sabā is telling in this regard:

Indeed, 'Abdallāh ibn Sabā was claiming that he was a prophet, and claimed that the Prince of Believers was Allāh – may He be Exalted above this. The news of this reached the Prince of Believers. He called on Ibn Sabā and asked him about this issue. But Ibn Sabā held fast, and said: "Yes, you are Him. It has been cast into my soul that you are, indeed, Allāh, and that I am a Prophet". And so the Prince of Believers said to him: "Woe be to you! The Shaytan is taunting you. May your mother weep for you! Go back from this statement, and repent". But Ibn Sabā refused. And so 'Alī imprisoned him, and sought his repentance for three days, and yet Ibn Sabā would not repent. And so 'Alī expelled him, and then executed him with fire.<sup>410</sup>

Interestingly enough, it seems that these followers only used this as further proof that 'Alī was, in fact, God, saying "Now we know that you are truly God, because only God tortures people by

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<sup>409</sup> Jafri 300.

<sup>410</sup> *Wasā'il* 28:336.

fire”.<sup>411</sup> This will become important for our discussion below. Ibn Sabā is often regarded as the “arch-heretic”, from whom all *ghuluww* began. A number of other doctrines are attributed to him as well: the belief that ‘Alī had not truly died after his assassination in Kūfah, and that he would return to establish justice in the earth, as well as the belief that the dead would return at the end of time.<sup>412</sup> Yet the idea that ‘Alī would return at the end of time, along with many others from the dead, is itself an accepted part of Shī‘ah orthodoxy.<sup>413</sup> Also, the idea that ‘Alī did not die may not be accepted by the orthodox Imāmī Shī‘ah, and yet we have seen this teaching made explicit in a number of previous *ḥadīths*. The Imāms are seen to be beings of Light that never truly die; their Light radiates for all eternity.<sup>414</sup> As such, the heretical doctrines that Ibn Sabā is accused of having do not seem that heretical at all. The only doctrine which he held that would be firmly regarded as heresy by modern Shī‘ah orthodoxy was his belief in the Divinity of the Imāms, and it was for this belief that he was either killed or banished. Yet in all the early *ḥadīths* concerning Ibn Saba’s death, he seems to be portrayed almost as a martyr. The obvious question to be asked about such stories is: why did he not repent? If the figure of Ibn Sabā formed part of the “cultural” mythology of early Imāmīs, then we should take these ambiguities seriously. They say something quite important about early Shi’ism. Other *ḥadīths* present similar stories about other “heretics”, refusing to repent for their belief in the Imām ‘Alī’s Divinity, and killed by ‘Alī himself:

When the Prince of Believers had finished with the people of Baṣrah, seventy people came to him from Az-Zat [said to be a place in *India*]. They greeted and spoke to him in their language, and ‘Alī responded to them in their language. He then said: “Indeed, I am not as you say. I am only a created servant of Allāh, and yet you deny Him”. They said: “*But you are Him*”. ‘Alī said: “If you do not cease this, and repent to Allāh for what you have said about me, then I will kill you”. But they refused to recant or repent. And so ‘Alī ordered that wells be dug for them, which was done. He then tossed them in on top of each other, and covered over their heads. He kindled a fire in one of the wells, though none of them were inside of that well. Nonetheless, the smoke entered upon them, until they suffocated.<sup>415</sup>

This *ḥadīth* is interesting in a number of regards: first is the fact that these *ghulāh* were said to have come from India, and even though they were from a distant land, they already had a firm

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<sup>411</sup> Moosa xvii.

<sup>412</sup> al-‘Asharī 15.

<sup>413</sup> Momen 166-170.

<sup>414</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 122.

<sup>415</sup> *Was’ā’il* 28:335.

belief in the Divinity of 'Alī. India occupies an interesting place in the *ḥadīth* literature; in one place, the Imāms talk about the science of astrology, and they say that it is only known by the Ahl al-Bayt of the Arabs and the Ahl al-Bayt of India.<sup>416</sup> The view of these *ghulāh* as being fundamentally alien reflects the sense of "invasion" that many of the Imāmīs at the time felt: some kind of hostile, foreign force with radically anti-Islamic beliefs were coming in, spreading blasphemy, and generally making mischief. A disciple of Imām Mūsā al-Kāzīm tells the Imām how he has heard about a man from India, who if he wishes would be able to make *ḥajj* to Jerusalem in a single day and night and then return to India, to which the Imām says that this is because of that man's knowledge of the Greatest Name of God.<sup>417</sup> India, then, seems to play an extremely important part of the mythology of primitive Shi'ism. Throughout the *ḥadīth* literature there seems to be some mystical significance to India and its inhabitants, and here we see a group of people from India journeying to meet 'Alī and proclaim their belief in his Divinity. Once again, they were asked to repent and refused, and so they were put to death. Yet besides this same anomaly, there is also the added issue that this *ḥadīth* itself has "quasi-*ghulāh*" tendencies: for 'Alī is seen to be able to communicate and speak the language of these Indians without any difficulty.

In any case, it should be observed that the presence of these *ḥadīths* has not dissuaded those sects that firmly deify 'Alī. Such people seem to be regarded as martyrs by both Corbin and Massignon.<sup>418</sup> The idea that the true believer may be subjected to torment, not just by his coreligionists, but also by the very being that he worships, has a certain basis within the Shī'ah *ḥadīth* literature as well.

Sometimes Allāh commands something, and yet He does not will it. And sometimes He wills something, and He does not order it. He commanded Iblīs to bow to Adam, *and yet He willed that Iblīs would not do so*. For if he had willed that Iblīs would bow to him, then certainly Iblīs would have done so.<sup>419</sup>

This *ḥadīth* is usually seen as justifying a pre-determinist philosophy, something else that early *ghulāh* were accused of believing in. This type of teaching has been meditated upon by others in

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<sup>416</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 96.

<sup>417</sup> *al-Kāfī* 1:381.

<sup>418</sup> Cf. Corbin's discussion of the "tragedy of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb" in *History* 75, which appears to be inspired by Massignon's reference to Abū al-Khaṭṭāb and others as being "martyrs of love", in the same tradition as al-Ḥallāj.

<sup>419</sup> *al-Kāfī* 1:151.

a far different light: Iblīs is seen as being somebody so in love with God that he could not possibly bow to anybody other than Allāh. The command to obey to Adam was merely a test of this love. But the test was not to see whether he would obey the command of Allāh, but rather to see whether or not his love was *weak* enough for him to bow to anybody other than God. As such, it was the most difficult of tests because Iblīs would have to endure eternal torment and pain for “passing” it and not bowing to Adam.<sup>420</sup> Massignon appears to imply the same kind of “test” had occurred with *ghulāh* like Ibn Sabā and Abū al-Khaṭṭāb: would these disciples recant their belief that ‘Alī was God, or would they endure painful death by fire as martyrs to his Divinity? This ideal of “spiritual chivalry” would become especially important in the thinking of the great Sufi martyr al-Ḥallāj, who was himself accused of being an incarnationist, as well as being one of the *ghulāh*.<sup>421</sup>

The fact that such an individual, associated (at least by his enemies) with the *ghulāh*, taught this doctrine of “love martyrdom” allows for the interpretation of these ambiguous narrations in another light. It is easy, of course, to assume that these narrations were created by the “moderate” faction in order to discredit the extremists. In light of the story about the “Indian extremists”, and the *ghulāh* themes that are latent within it, we would like to provide an alternative theory: this body of narrations where the *ghulāh* are executed by the first Imām may not have been the product of the “moderates”, *but rather of the ghulāh themselves*. Certainly, amongst many more contemporary *ghulāh*, these stories look to be more of a *hagiography* than a heresiography; and we have seen how the narrations concerning Ibn Saba’s execution were seen by his followers as a story of *praise*. Given that some of these narrations, such as that of the Indians, explicitly refer to the Imām’s supernatural powers, it seems more likely that we can trace these narrations back to the *ghulāh* themselves. This might also help us to trace the origins of al-Ḥallāj’s teachings concerning Satan, especially if he had been under the influence of extremist Shī‘ism.

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<sup>420</sup> Nurbaksh 5-48.

<sup>421</sup> Massignon 150-151.

## Tafwīd: The Imām as Demiurge

### The Cosmogenic Imām

The idea that the Imām is God and the idea that he is a demiurge are, of course, not the same thing. It is possible to believe the latter without the former, and it is the latter that emerges in the Qummī *ḥadīth* works, with thunderous condemnations of whoever believes the former. The belief that the “proof of Allāh”, at least as it is presented in the early *ḥadīth* literature, appears to have gone much deeper amongst the early Imāmī Shī‘ī than we have previously discussed. Instructive in this regard are those *ḥadīths* that do hint towards the assertion of a higher unity between God and the Imām (especially ‘Alī), which form a larger body of narrations where the Imāms are posited as basically demiurgic figures, responsible for the creation and maintenance of the universe. We have already seen some of this in our study of *Al-Kāfī*, where we noted the emphasis given to the doctrine of the Imām as cosmogenic being, something that is not emphasized to the same degree in earlier works such as *Baṣā‘ir*. As we will see below, much of this genre of *ḥadīths* occurs in much later works, like *Al-Manāqib* and *Biḥār al-Anwār*.

This doctrine is usually characterized as *tafwīd* (delegation),<sup>422</sup> and its followers as “*mufawwiḍah*.”<sup>423</sup> The doctrine of *tafwīd* is intimately related to the idea of a transcendent and unknowable God. Halm describes the the *tafwīd* of the Shī‘ah *mufawwiḍah* as the belief that an unknowable, “Nameless” God has created a demiurge, charged with both creating the universe and maintaining it.<sup>424</sup> In the early Imāmī Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* literature, this demiurgic entity is usually identified with the “primordial Light” of the Prophet and his family. Sometimes this group is also referred to as the *mukhammisa*, the “fivers”, because of the privileged position given to the “Holy Five”: the Prophet, ‘Alī, Fatima, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn.<sup>425</sup> As is obvious, this doctrine does not necessarily entail

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<sup>422</sup> It should be noted that the meaning of *tafwīd* in this context is very different than the way that it is usually understood in the Islamic theological context, as the antipode to predestination (i.e., as a synonym for “free will”).

<sup>423</sup> Modarressi 21-29.

<sup>424</sup> Halm “Das Buch der Schatten I” 250.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid. 250-251.

that the Imām is God Himself, though it certainly assumes that the Imām has Divine Attributes (omnipotence, omniscience, and, most importantly, the Creator and Sustainer of the cosmos). The heresiographers also attribute the same technical vocabulary used by sects that specifically believe in God's Incarnation in the form of the Imām to this "sect" as well. In fact, it would seem that the term *mufawwiḍah* is often used interchangeably with the term *ghāḥ*.<sup>426</sup>

The "power" of the Imām seems to be a source of great trepidation and hesitation amongst later Shī'ah. The large body of narrations that ascribe to them absolutely supernatural powers (even the ability to annihilate everything in the cosmos, if they choose) are quite numerous, and they tend to further blur the distinction between the Imāms and God. In much of the early *ḥadīth* literature, the Imām is presented as an omnipotent and omniscient being, fully endowed with all Divine powers. Amir-Moezzi refers to the following *ḥadīth* of *al-Kāfī*, where the Prophet says to 'Alī:

Something in you is like Jesus the son of Mary, and if I were not afraid that certain groups in my Community might say about you what the Christians said about him, I would reveal something about you that would make people collect the dust from under your feet in order to get its blessing.<sup>427</sup>

This *ḥadīth* gives expression to what must have been an underlying anxiety faced by the Shī'ah community with regards to these narrations: So much praise is given to 'Alī, so much devotion, and so much adoration that one is left asking: what *is* the difference between 'Alī and God? The Prophet is seen here attempting to keep a secret about 'Alī, fearful that the Muslims will go astray as did the Christians. And yet, according to some *ḥadīths*, 'Alī is said to have been willing to reveal some of what the Prophet had kept hidden in his time. One of the most controversial *ḥadīths* in this regard, which many contemporary Shī'ah '*ulamā'* have fulminated against as being a forgery of the *ghulāh*, is the *Khuṭbat al-Bayān* of 'Alī. This *ḥadīth* is also quite long and we can only quote a portion of it here. It does not occur in *al-Kāfī* or other *ḥadīth* literature, and does not seem to appear until the much later works *Bihār al-Ma'ārif* and *Mashāriq al-Anwār*. Amir-Moezzi has translated it

<sup>426</sup> Ibid. 250. Halm's interpretation that the "extremist" technical term "the Meaning", discussed above, is used by these sects to refer to the demiurge as opposed to the "Divine Essence" (as the "proper" *gulat* seem to), seems difficult. The distinction between the Imām as demiurge and as the Incarnation of God seems somewhat vague during this early period.

<sup>427</sup> Qtd. in Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 231, footnote 689.



into French in his *Aspects de l'Imāmologie Duodécime*.<sup>428</sup> Even though this specific sermon does not seem to occur exactly in any earlier works, it is clearly a synthesis of many early *ḥadīths* from the Qumm school, gracefully attributed to 'Alī (perhaps to help fill the gap of such teachings amongst pre-Bāqir Imāmī Shī'ite Imāms). The most controversial part of the *ḥadīth* is, perhaps, where 'Alī refers to *himself* as the Creator of the Universe. Furthermore, continuous analogies are made between him and previous prophets and saintly figures. The text of the *ḥadīth* we are using occurs in the compilation *Nahj al-Asrār*, though there are other versions as well.<sup>429</sup> which has become a very important book for subcontinent Imāmī Shī'ites:

I am he who holds the secrets of the Unknown. No one knows them after Muḥammad except me. I know everything. I am the one of whom the Prophet of Allāh said: "I am the city of knowledge, and 'Alī is its gate". I am Dhū al-Qamayn mentioned in the first book. I am the rock, from which sprang forth twelve wells. I am the one who takes charge of the entirety of Creation's account. I am the Preserved Tablet. I am the side of Allāh. I am the heart of Allāh. I am the turner of hearts and visions. I am "Indeed, to Us is their ultimate destiny, and then their account will be upon Us". I am the one of whom the Prophet said: "The straight path is you, and the place of standing is your place of standing". I am the one who has the knowledge of the book, about what is and what shall become. I am the first Adam. I am the first Noah. I am Ibrahim the Friend when he was cast in the fire. I am the reality of secrets. I am the friend of the believers. I am the opener of causes. I am the former of clouds. I am the waterer of trees. I am the one who draws out the fruits. I am the flower of wells. I am the one who holds the earths in place. I am the holder of the skies. I am the *Faṣl al-Khiṭāb*. I apportion heaven and Hell.

I am the translator of Allāh's Revelation. I am infallible from Allāh. I am the storehouse of Allāh's knowledge. I am the proof of Allāh for all that is in the heavens and above the earths. I am the one who stands for justice. I am the Earthworm. I am the Violent Clamor.<sup>430</sup> I am the Clamor which comes next.<sup>431</sup> I am the scream of Truth on the Day of Opening. I am the one from whom nothing is hidden in the heavens and earth. I am the Hour, which will be most tormenting for the one who denies it. I am that book, of which there is no doubt. I am the most beautiful names, of which it is commanded by Allāh that He be called by them. I am the Light from which Moses learned, and from which he was guided. I am the splitter of the moons. I am the one who will bring the believers from their graves.

I am the one who has a thousand books from the books of the Prophets. I am the one who speaks every language of the world. I am the Lord (*sāhib*) of Noah, and the one who rescued him. I am the Lord of Jonah, and the one who saved him. I am the companion of the Trumpet. I am the raiser of those who are in the graves. I am the Lord of the Day of Resurrection. I have raised the heavens by the permission and power of my Lord. I am the Forgiving, the Merciful (*rahīm*), and indeed my punishment is most painful.

<sup>428</sup> Amir-Moezzi "Aspects de la'Imāmologie" 210-214.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid. 207.

<sup>430</sup> A reference to verse 79:6.

<sup>431</sup> 79:7.

Through me, Ibrahim the Friend submitted, through me he held fast to my bounty. I am the staff of Moses, which holds the forelock of all creation. I am the one who gazed at the Dominion (*malakūt*), and did not see anything other than me, and from was hidden all other than me. I am the one who encompasses creation. Indeed, they shall grow until I return them back to Allāh. I am the one who for whom the Word in my presence is not changed, and I am not oppressive to the servants. I am the friend of Allāh in His Earth, the one who takes charge of His Command, and the judge over His servants. I am the one who, when he calls upon the sun and the moon, they respond to me...

I am the one who raises up the Prophets and Messengers. Am the one who gazes upon the universes. I am the one who holds fast the earths, and the knower without a teacher. I am the Command of Allāh and the Spirit, of which Allāh has said: "They ask you about the Spirit. say: The spirit is from the command of my Lord". I am what Allāh said to His Prophet when He said: "Cast into Hell, ever rebellious disbeliever". By the command of my Lord, I am the destroyer of all things after they come into being. I am the one who fixes the mountains, and expands the earth. I am the one who breaks open the wells, and plants the crops, and grows the fruits. I am the one who brings forth the trees. I am the one who gives them their strength, and I am the one who brings down the rains, the one who brings forth the thunder, the breaker of dawns, and the bringer of stars. I am the creator of the stars and the substance of the heavens. I am the one who brings forth the Hour. I am the one who, if he dies, does not die, and if he is killed, is not killed. I am the one who knows what occurs, and the Hour after the Hour. I am the one who knows the thoughts of the hearts, and the glances of the eyes. The secrets of the breasts are not hidden from me.<sup>432</sup>

The following sermon is instructive in this regard; it is another sermon of ecstatic utterances from 'Alī, very similar to the *Khutbat al-Bayān*. This is the *Ḥadīth al-Mufakhirah*, recording in the *Faḍā'il* of Shadhān ibn Jibrā'il al-Qummī:

I am the firm rope of Allāh the Exalted, which Allāh has ordered the Creation to hold fast when He says: "All of you hold fast, together, to the rope of Allāh". I am the radiant star of Allāh. I am the one whom the angels visit. I am the Speaking Tongue of Allāh. I am the Proof of Allāh the Exalted upon His Creation. I am the Face of Allāh in the Heavens, and I am the Manifest Side of Allāh. I am the one of whom Allāh – May He be Glorified and Exalted – has said: "Indeed, they are noble servants. They are not preceded by the Word, and they carry out the Command". I am the Firm Handhold of Allāh, "which cannot be broken, and indeed, Allāh is hearing and seeing".<sup>433</sup> I am the gate of Allāh, through which they enter. I am the knowledge of Allāh on the Path. I am the House of Allāh.<sup>434</sup> He who enters it is safe. Those held fast to my *walāyah* and to the love of me, they are safe from the fire.<sup>435</sup>

The specific assertions of Divinity have to be gleaned carefully in these sermons. We see, for example, that in the second sermon, 'Alī identifies himself with the verse "Indeed, Allāh is Hearing

<sup>432</sup> *Nahj al-Asrār* 119-128.

<sup>433</sup> 2:256.

<sup>434</sup> Usually the "holy house" refers to the mosque of Jerusalem, but here it would seem obviously to refer to the *Ka'bah*.

<sup>435</sup> *Faḍā'il* 84.

and Seeing". This type of language occurs in a number of the ecstatic *ḥadīths*, and translating them is difficult. This seems to be an indirect way of asserting Divinity:. Rather than saying "I am Allāh" 'Alī is seen to say: "I am 'Indeed, Allāh is the Hearing and Seeing".

With this body of narrations, we can begin to see how the beliefs of many *ghulāb* sects were not as heterodox as it might appear at first glance. Here, we see all the main themes that would become so-important for the so-called extremist sects: the eternality of the Imām, the Imām's role as a demiurge, and his absolute omniscience, omnipotence, and even transcendence. Very similar narrations have been used by sects like the Nuṣayrīs to justify their belief in the Divinity of 'Alī. The Nuṣayrīs quote the following *ḥadīth* in their own books, the language of which is strikingly similar to the *Khuṭbat al-Bayān*. In response to the question "How do we know that our master, commander of the faithful, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib" is God?" a Nuṣayrī catechism answers:

By his own testimony and his description of himself in a famous sermon which he preached from the pulpit in the presence of the whole audience, but it was understood only by men of reason and clear vision. He then said: "I have the knowledge of the Hour (of resurrection) and to me did the messengers point, preach my unity, and summon toward knowing me. I gave names to [all parts of the universe], unfolded its lands, established its mountains, made its rivers flow and the earth give its produce. I am he who darkened it, raised the sun, and lit the moon. I created the creatures and bestowed livelihood. I am lord of lords and master of men; I am the supreme, the knower; I am a knight of iron. I am the creator and the reviver. I inserted Jesus into the womb of his mother Mary, and I am he who sent messengers and made prophets prophesy".<sup>436</sup>

As stated, the actual *Khuṭbat al-Bayān* does not seem to appear until much later in the *ḥadīth* literature. Most likely, it is a synthesis of a number of narrations and themes which can be found in earlier books. The teaching that the Imām is a kind of demiurge is found throughout the early Imāmī Shī'ī *ḥadīth* literature, and is seen as one of the main reasons why there must *always* be an Imām.<sup>437</sup> This teaching seems to be implied in some famous narrations that were recorded in some of the "400 sources", such as the following narration of the Prophet, reported by the Fourth Imām:

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<sup>436</sup> Bar-Asher and Kofsky 171.

<sup>437</sup> The presence of such narrations in the pre-*ghaybah* period should indicate a very different understanding of Imāmate than the purely legalistic theology formulated later. It also shows that these narrations were probably not forged in the post-*ghaybah* period in order to explain the obvious question as to the purpose of a Hidden Imām; rather, the evidence of the Kaysāniyyah and other sects indicates that the possibility of Occultation was intimately bound up with esoteric ideas of Imāmate.

The stars in the heavens are what secure the people of the heavens; if the stars were destroyed, the people of the heavens would have to face that which they hate [apparently destruction]. And the stars from the people of my house, those Noble ones from my eleven children, they are what secure the people of the earth, and keep it from shaking with its inhabitants. If the stars from the people of my family were destroyed, the people of the earth would have to face that which they hate.<sup>438</sup>

Imām al-Bāqir said: Indeed, me, my eleven grandchildren, and you, O ‘Ali, balance the earth; by this I mean the placings of its mountains as pegs. Allāh has pegged the earth in place, so that it is not destroyed with its people; if my eleven children depart, then the world will be destroyed along with all its people.<sup>439</sup>

Imām al-Bāqir said: “Indeed, if the earth were to remain one day without an Imām from us, it would be destroyed with all of its people, that Allāh would punish it with the most severe of punishments. This is because Allāh has made us His Proofs and Security in the Earth, for the people of the earth....When Allāh desires to destroy them and not give them any respite or delay, then he removes us from them and takes us up to him, and then Allāh does what He wills.”<sup>440</sup>

Early Shī‘ism seems to have viewed the Imām in a far, far greater capacity than later orthodoxy. His role was not merely to preserve religion, but to preserve the cosmos itself. This cosmological function is joined to a soteriological one. In *al-Kāfī*, ‘Alī is addressed as the one who will apportion of heaven and Hell in the *du‘a* to be recited when one visits his grave.<sup>441</sup> al-Majlisī cites the following narration in this regard from *al-Amālī* of Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq, where the Prophet says to ‘Alī:

O ‘Alī! On the Day of Judgment you will be brought forward on a camel made of Light. On your head there will be a crown, with four pillars. On each pillar, there will be written three times: ‘There is no God but Allāh, Muḥammad is the Prophet of Allāh, and ‘Alī is the key to Paradise’. A seat known as the Seat of Nobility will be placed for you, and you will be placed upon it. All beings from the beginning of the world to the end will be brought before you on a single plane. And you will command your Shī‘ahs to enter the paradise, and your enemies to enter Hell. And so you are the one who shall apportion heaven and Hell. Joyous is the one who loves you, ruined and lost is the one who hates. On that day, you are the Trustworthy of Allāh, and His most manifest Proof.<sup>442</sup>

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<sup>438</sup> Muṣṭafawī 16.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid.

<sup>441</sup> *al-Kāfī* 4:570.

<sup>442</sup> *Biḥār* 7:339.

This narration makes explicit the idea that ‘Alī will, in fact, be the “Lord of the Day of Resurrection”,<sup>443</sup> and that he will be the one who judges humanity on that day. This specific idea could be taken as blurring the line between Creator and Creation. It was still accepted by a great number of more orthodox members of the Imāmī community.<sup>444</sup> Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq includes a discussion about the reasons for accepting this body of narrations in his *‘Ilal Ash-Sharā’i*. The following *ḥadīth* is from the “accursed” Mufaḍḍal ibn ‘Umar; but in spite of the fact that later ‘ulamā’ (like al-Ḥillī) would say that it was forbidden to narrate *ḥadīths* from him, Aṣ-Ṣadūq has included this narration in his work:

Mufaḍḍal ibn ‘Umar said: I asked Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq: “Why did Amīr al-Mu’minīn become the divider between heaven and Hell?” To which the Imām said: “Because love of him is faith and hatred of him is disbelief [*kufr*]. Indeed, the paradise was created for the people of faith, and Hell for people of disbelief. And so he is the divider between heaven and Hell, and for this reason: because none will enter paradise except those who love him, and none will enter paradise except his lovers, and none will enter Hell except those who despise him”.

And so Mufaḍḍal said to him: “O son of the Prophet, so the Prophets and the Inheritors all loved him, and all of his enemies hated him?”

Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq said: “Yes”.

Mufaḍḍal said: “How can this be the case?”

The Imām said: “You know that the Prophet said on the Day of Khaybar: ‘The flag will be given tomorrow to a man who loves Allāh and His Prophet, and Allāh and His Prophet love him, and he will not return until Allāh has brought victory by his hands’. And so he gave the flag to ‘Alī, and Allāh brought victory through his hands”.

Mufaḍḍal said: “Yes”.

The Imām continued: “And you know that the Prophet came into possession of a roast bird, he said: ‘Oh Allāh, bring me the person who, from amongst all your creations, is most loved by you and loved by me, to sit and share this bird with me.’ And of course he meant ‘Alī”.

Mufaḍḍal said: “Yes”.

The Imām said: “And so is it permissible the Prophets and Messengers of Allāh and their inheritors did not love the man who was loved by Allāh and the Prophet, and did not love the man who loved Allāh and the Prophet?”

Mufaḍḍal said: “No”.

The Imām said: “And so is it permissible that the believers from their nations did not love the beloved of Allāh and the Prophet, and the beloved of their own Prophets?”

Mufaḍḍal said: “No”.

The Imām said: “Then it is proven that all of the Prophets of Allāh and his Prophet and all of the believers loved ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib. And it is proven that their enemies and those who rebelled against them hated them, and hated all who loved them”.

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<sup>443</sup> 1:4

<sup>444</sup> Moosa 63.

Mufaḍḍal said: “Yes”.

The Imām said: “As such, no one will enter the Paradise except who loves the first ones and the last ones, and no one will enter Hell except those who hate the first ones and the last ones. As such, ‘Alī is the divider between heaven and Hell.”<sup>445</sup>

This particular narration serves to explain the reasons underlying ‘Alī’s title “the one who apportions heaven and Hell”, which occurs in *al-Kāfī* as well as dozens of other times various books such as the *Iḥtijāj* of aṭ-Ṭabrisī<sup>446</sup>, five times in the *Amālī* of Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq,<sup>447</sup> and the *Amālī* of al-Mufīd.<sup>448</sup> With these narrations, we see the line between Allāh and Creation broken down. Traditional Muslim orthodoxy would hold, of course, that only Allāh will decide who enters heaven and who enters Hell. Yet here, the entirety of this process is given over to ‘Alī. It is narrations like this that have been used by Nuṣayrīs to prove that ‘Alī is, in fact, God. They do not deny the Qur’ānic verses where the power of judgment is given to God and God alone, but they merely unite these verses with narrations like the above to draw the conclusion that, since ‘Alī will be apportioning heaven and Hell on the Day of Judgment, he must be God.

At the same time, one has to note the *rational* nature of the argument. There is no notion of esotericism here, or of a secret teaching that is not fit for the masses; the logic is one that could easily be presented to anybody with the most rudimentary knowledge of Islamic eschatology. This is another example of the way that ideas held by the *ghulāh* are rationalized and used to fill gaps in Imāmī theology, such as how Divine justice will actually operate on the day of judgement. It is a perfect blend of ‘Alid legitimism, mysticism, and rationalist theology.

The idea that ‘Alī is all-powerful has a great deal of basis within the early Imāmī Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* literature as well. We have seen this doctrine made explicit in the *Khuṭbat al-Bayān*. There, ‘Alī describes his power to incinerate everything in the heavens and earths, if he so pleases. In many narrations, this specific power is said to be the result of his knowledge about the “Greatest Name” (*al-‘ism al-‘azam*) of Allāh. This belief in the power of the Greatest Name was seen to be one of the important *ghulāh* beliefs; Bayān ibn Sam‘an was accused of *ghuluww* for saying that he possessed this Name, and for his belief that he could control heavenly bodies through it.<sup>449</sup> A number of narrations in

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<sup>445</sup> Aṣ-Ṣadūq *‘Ilal* 1:193-195.

<sup>446</sup> aṭ-Ṭabrisī *Iḥtijāj* 1:229.

<sup>447</sup> Aṣ-Ṣadūq *al-Amālī* 31, 46, 89, 361, 670.

<sup>448</sup> al-Mufīd *al-Amālī* 213.

<sup>449</sup> See first chapter.

*al-Kāfī* and other books deal with the power of this Name, the uttering of which can be used to perform even the most unimaginable feats. The narrations concerning this in *al-Kāfī* include:

Indeed, the Greatest Name of Allāh consists of seventy-three letters. Āsaf<sup>450</sup> was in possession of one of these letters. He spoke with, and he was able to collapse the space of the earth between him and the throne of Bīlqīs [the queen of Sheba], until it reached into his hand. After this, he then expanded the earth back to its original state, and did all of this in the blink of an eye. As for ourselves, we possess seventy-two letters of the Greatest Name, and only one letter remains with Allāh the Exalted himself, and it is part of His Knowledge of the Unseen. There is no power or strength except by Allāh.<sup>451</sup>

The idea of the Greatest Name actually deals with two concepts: one is the absolute Unknowability of God, and the other is the miraculous powers of the Imāms and their special initiation into secrets not held by others (i.e., an esoteric knowledge). The belief that the Greatest Name of God is something separate from the name “Allāh” establishes the idea that there is a Divine Reality that extends beyond profane knowledge. We have seen how, in one of Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq’s *ḥadīths* about the nature of the Divine attributes, that he denies any transcendental significance to the name Allāh: there, he tells Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam that Allāh is merely derived from the Arabic word *illah*. This Name, then, is merely a convention of the Arabic language; it does not indicate the *true* reality of God in the way that the Greatest Name does. The parallels with the Greatest Name in Judaism are obvious.<sup>452</sup> And yet, even the Imāms do not claim to have complete knowledge of this Name. Beyond the Imāms, then, there seems to be a transcendental darkness within the Essence of the Godhead, unknowable to all.

The idea of the Greatest Name is also important in terms of the larger doctrine of a transcendental and primordial Imāmah. Each Prophet is seen to have been given a “part” of this Divine Name by which he was able to work miraculous powers. In another *ḥadīth* of Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq, it is said:

Indeed, Jesus the son of Mary was given two letters [of the Greatest Name], and it was these two letters that he used. Moses was given four letters, and Abraham was given eight. Noah was given five, and Adam was given 15. And Allāh the Exalted

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<sup>450</sup> Āsaf is the *jinn* who performs miraculous feats on behalf of Sulayman in the Qur’ān. He is said to have been able miraculously to transport the throne of the Queen of Sheba from her palace to Sulayman’s presence. Here, this power is said to derive from his own (limited) knowledge of the Greatest Name of Allāh.

<sup>451</sup> *al-Kāfī* 1:230.

<sup>452</sup> Tucker “Bayān” 249.

gave all of these [apparently different] letters to Muḥammad. Indeed, the Greatest Name of Allāh is seventy-three letters, and Muḥammad was given 72, and Allāh veiled from him only one.<sup>453</sup>

Here, the Imāms are presented as being the inheritors of all previous Prophets and revelations, while surpassing all those who came before in knowledge and power. Perhaps the most important supernatural powers of the Imāms involve their ability to know “everything”. In this vein, we read in *al-Kāfī*:

If the Imām desires to know something, he knows it.<sup>454</sup>

If the Imām desires to know something, Allāh will teach it to him.<sup>455</sup>

Within one of the “400 sources”, we read:

Indeed, we have a container, which we fill up with wisdom and knowledge.<sup>456</sup>

Nothing, then, is seen to be outside the grasp of the Imāms, except perhaps the inner Ipseity of God that transcends all knowledge (and, perhaps, transcends the subject/object distinctions of knower and known). A clairvoyant power is seen as a fundamental part of their Imāmah, and it seen to be an essential part of Imāmah. In another set of narrations, we read:

What kind of Imām does not know what will befall him and what will become of him? Such a person could never be the Proof of God over Creation.<sup>457</sup>

It would seem, then, that the very idea of the Imām being the connection between heaven and earth implies omniscience and omnipotence in Creation. Though this idea was presented in the early Imāmī Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* literature, it was rejected by many later Shī‘ah ‘*ulamā*’. Previously, we made reference to Shaykh al-Mufīd’s contention that the Imāms may judge among people on the basis of

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<sup>453</sup> Ibid.

<sup>454</sup> *al-Kāfī* 1:258.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

<sup>456</sup> Muṣṭafawī 4.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid.



fallible, manifest evidences, and that they may very well make a mistake in that capacity. The argument for this is entirely legalistic. The Imāms only purpose is to enforce Islamic law, and since Islamic law only requires judges to rule according to *sharī'ah* evidences, there is no reason for the Imām to be endowed with any kind of psychic powers.<sup>458</sup> This attitude, however, seems to contradict the idea of Imāmah as presented in the early *ḥadīth* literature. Other narrations, such as *Khuṭbat al-Bayān*, also emphatically assert that the Imāms know absolutely everything, and have power over absolutely everything.

The demiurgic role of the Imām is the most striking theme in the *Khuṭbat al-Bayān*. there 'Alī specifically refers to himself as the Creator. The specific words "I am the Creator" do not seem to occur in any of the earlier *ḥadīth* works, or even in later encyclopedias like *Bihār al-Anwār*. Similar identifications of the Imām with Allāh occur in other narrations, as has been seen in the previous discussion. One can also extrapolate this teaching from the *ḥadīths* where the Imāms say: 'We are the most Beautiful Names of Allāh', since the Name *al-Khāliq* [The Creator] is one of these Names.

#### The Imām as "Luminous" Being

It could also be argued that the idea that the Imām is a demiurge is derived from another long tradition, shared by both Sunnī mystics and Shī'ahs, where the Prophet Muḥammad and 'Alī were the first beings that Allāh created, and it was from their primordial Light that the rest of existence was brought into being. In this sense, the Imāms are seen to be the Creators of the universe, because everything derives from their radiance. This is referred to in al-Majlisī's *Ḥayāt al-Qulūb*, where he writes:

The Prophet declared that the Most High created him, and Aly, and Fātimah, and Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn, before the creation of Adam, and when as yet there was neither heaven, nor earth, nor darkness, nor light, nor sun, nor moon, nor paradise, nor Hell. Abbas, the uncle of Mohammed, inquired, In what mode was the commencement of your existence, O prophet of God? He replied, When God willed to create us, He uttered a word from which He formed light; then He pronounced another word from which He created spirit; He next tempered the light with the spirit, and then formed me and Aly and Fātimah and Ḥasan and Ḥusayn; and we ascribed praise to God when besides ourselves there was not another existence to give Him glory. When God purposed to create the universe, He expanded my light and from it formed the empyrean, which being created of my light, that

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<sup>458</sup> See below.

is, derived from the light of God. I am therefore more excellent than the empyrean. He next expanded the light of my brother Aly, and from it formed the angels, consequently, he is more excellent than they. He next expanded the light of my daughter Fāṭimah, and formed from it the heavens and the earth, which are therefore inferior to her. Afterwards, He expanded the light of my grandson Ḥasan, and from it formed the sun and moon, so that he is superior to them. Lastly, He expanded the light of my grandson Ḥusayn, and from it formed Paradise and the Hoorees, therefore he is more excellent than they are.<sup>459</sup>

The theme of Light is one of the most distinctive features of the early Imāmī *ḥadīth* literature;<sup>460</sup> and the Primordial and Luminous nature of the Imāms is referred to in many quite early *ḥadīth*. In one of the “400 sources”, we read:

‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn [the fourth Imām] said: Indeed, Allāh created Muḥammad, ‘Alī, and ‘Alī’s twelve descendants from the Light of His Glory. He made them shadows in the radiance of His Light, worshipping Him and Glorifying Him and Sanctifying Him before the Creation of Creation. And these were the Imāms from the progeny of the Prophet of Allāh.<sup>461</sup>

This seems to be where the following narration of Imām al-Bāqir from Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Ju’fī was derived:

“O Jābir, the first beings that God created were Muḥammad and his family, the rightly guided ones and the guides; they were the phantoms of light before God.’ I asked, “And what were the phantoms?” al-Bāqir said: “Shadows of light, luminous bodies without spirits; they were strengthened by the Holy Spirit, through which Muḥammad and his family worshipped God. For that reason, He created them forbearing, learned, endowed with filial piety, and pure; they worship God through prayer, fasting, prostrating themselves, enumerating His names, and ejaculating: God is great”.<sup>462</sup>

The belief, then, is that the Imāms are fundamentally beings of Light, whose physicality is only a temporary state. All of Creation is drawn from that Light, because they are the Light of Allāh Himself. The Nuṣayrīs also believe in this, and cite the same body of narrations. Moosa writes:

Like the Imāmī Shī’ites, the Nuṣayrīs maintain that the twelve Imāms existed before all of creation. The Imām Jafar al-Sadiq is reported to have said that God created the Imāms thousands of years before He created Adam. They were spirits around the

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<sup>459</sup> al-Majlisī *Hayat* 4.

<sup>460</sup> Rubin has devoted an excellent study to this subject; as stated there, this theme of Light is primarily but not exclusively associated with Shī’ism during the early period (Rubin 65). It would also become one of the central motifs of Sunnī Sufism. Amir-Moezzi makes interesting comparisons in this regard; cf. *Divine Guide* 52-53.

<sup>461</sup> Muṣṭafawī 15.

<sup>462</sup> Jafri 301

throne of God, praising Him, and were joined by all the heavenly host in their praise. Later the Imāms descended to earth in physical bodies; there they continued to praise God, joined in their praise by the people of the earth.<sup>463</sup>

It is said in other narrations that true knowledge of the Imām involves perceiving him in his Light, rather than his mere physical form. The following *ḥadīth* is also attributed to Jābir al-Ju'fī, and involves a meeting he had with Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq. In this meeting, the Imām transfigures himself, and displays his primordial Light to his disciple:

Jābir thought to himself: "This man [the Imām] is the Veil. What then will be he whom he veils?" The Imām, having telepathically heard this question in Jābir's mind, raised his head upwards. Then Jābir said: "I saw an extraordinary splendour gleaming in him, a dazzling light that my eyes could scarcely sustain or my intelligence contain". And the Imām said: "Should I show you still more?" "No", said Jābir. "This is my measure".<sup>464</sup>

The emphasis on light here is important. Perceiving the Imām does not involve a physical perception of a being who is bound to the normal limits of space and time. True perception of the Imām involves a dazzling experience of Light, and this would seem to be knowing the Imām in his Luminous Essence. Many *ḥadīths* in *al-Kāfī* describe the Imām specifically as the "Light of Allāh", and this particular narration of Jābir is, perhaps, a deeper explanation of a concept that is dealt with in other *ḥadīths*. This spiritual experience of the Imām's Light, which is referred to as an *internal* act of mystical or esoteric perception, is dealt with in a *ḥadīth* of Imām al-Bāqir:

Abū Khālid al-Kābūlī asked Abū Ja'far [Imām al-Bāqir] about Allāh the Exalted and Glorified's Words: "And so believe in Allāh and his Prophet and the Light which he has sent down."<sup>465</sup> Imām al-Bāqir said: "O Abū Khālid! I swear by Allāh that the Light is the Imāms of the Prophet's family, which lasts until the day of judgment. I swear by Allāh, that they are the Light which He has sent down. I swear by Allāh, that they are the Light of Allāh in the heavens and the Earth. O Abū Khālid! By Allāh, the Light of the Imām in the hearts of the believers is brighter than the brilliant day star. By Allāh, they illuminate the hearts of the believers. And Allāh will veil that Light from whomever He wills, and so their hearts will become dark. O Abū Khālid! No one loves us and adores us until Allāh purifies their heart, and Allāh will purify no one's heart until they submit to us. If one submits to us, Allāh will deliver him from a painful account, and will give him no fear on the Great Day of the Resurrection".<sup>466</sup>

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<sup>463</sup> Moosa 353.

<sup>464</sup> Corbin *Cyclical* 143.

<sup>465</sup> 24:55.

<sup>466</sup> *al-Kāfī* 1:194.

The idea that the Imām is the light *within* the heart of the believer will be discussed more below.<sup>467</sup> The key issue here is the way that the Imām is seen to be a “beacon of Light” within the absolute Unknowability of God. These *ḥadīths*, along with those dealing with the *ta’īl* of Divine Attributes and the Unknowability of God, combine in the early *ḥadīth* literature into a general doctrine of how God is known: God in His Transcendence remains ultimately dark, beyond the grasp of human reason or perception. Yet the Imām is His Light, the Light by which God becomes known and through which a believer perfects his faith. Once again, we see the distinction between God and Creation made ambiguous. The Imām is specifically referred to as the Light of God in this narration. It might have been such teachings that would inspire later sects, such as the Nuṣayrīs, to engage in a practice of “sun-worship”, with the sun believed to be the repository of the eternal Light that is ‘Alī. Also instructive in this regard are the narrations that talk about the “primordial Intellect”, which has often been identified with the figure of the Prophet and Imāms:<sup>468</sup>

Indeed, Allāh the Exalted and Glorified created the Intellect, and it was the first of the spiritual entities that He created from His Light, drawing it forth from the right side of His Throne. He said to it: “Go”, and so it went. And then He said to it: “Come”, and so it came. Then Allāh the Exalted and Glorified said: “Indeed, I have made you a glorious creation, and I have ennobled you above all My Creation”.<sup>469</sup>

Perhaps the most important narration in this regard is the *ḥadīth* of “Luminous Knowledge”, which seems to make its first appearance in the *Bihār al-Anwār*, but contains many of the doctrines already discussed. It consists of a sermon given by the first Imām, ‘Alī, to two of his most important disciples: Salmān al-Farsī and Abū Dharr al-Ghaffarī. The presence of Salmān is highly important in this context, for (as will be discussed below) Salmān is portrayed as being one of the few perfect Shī‘ites who has reached the heights of mystic perception. His status is so high that, in some narrations, he is referred to as actually being a member of the Prophet’s family.<sup>470</sup> We have seen, as well, that the Nuṣayrīs make him the “Gate” towards the other members of their sacred Trinity, Muḥammad and ‘Alī, and so Salmān himself is seen to be part of God’s threefold Incarnation. In this

<sup>467</sup> It is important to remember that, according to many narrations, the believers themselves are said to have been born from the Light of the Imāms; luminosity, then, is not only for the Imām, but applies to the Imām’s true “Shī‘ah” as well. Cf. Kohlberg *Belief* 7.

<sup>468</sup> Cf. Al-‘Amulī 380.

<sup>469</sup> *al-Kaḥf* 1:21.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.* 345.

*ḥadīth*, he appears to be at a somewhat less mature station spiritually: he is seen asking ‘Alī what it is that he must know or become aware of in order to complete his faith, and properly “know the Imām of his time, the Imām to whom obedience is ordered”. The *ḥadīth* is quite long; but it has not yet been presented in any English work on the Shī‘ah *ḥadīth* literature, and it brings together all of the themes that have been discussed so far. We can quote relevant portions of the sermon here:

“O Salmān and Jundab! Muḥammad became the Remembrance of which Allāh says: “We have sent down to all of you the Remembrance and the Messenger, who recites to you the Signs of Allāh”. Indeed, I have given the knowledge of the blessings and the trials and the essence of the Book. I have been made the store-house of the Qur’ānic knowledge and all that will exist until the Day of Judgment. The Prophet established the Proof for people, and I am the Proof of Allāh the Exalted and Glorified. Allāh has given me what he has given none other from the past generations or the present, not to any Messenger-Prophet nor to any of the close angels.

“O Salmān and Jundab! I am the one who carried Noah in his boat by the command of my Lord. I am the one who brought Jonah from the belly of the fish by the command of my Lord. I am the one who brought Mūsā son of ‘Imran through the sea by the command of my Lord. I am the one who took Abraham from the fire by the command of my Lord. I am the one who make their rivers flow, opens the wells, and plants the trees, by the command of my Lord. Everyday I heard the words of the hypocrites and tyrants, and understand their languages. I am Khidr,<sup>471</sup> the teacher of Moses. I was the teacher of Solomon the son of David. I am Dhū al-Qarnayn. I am the Power of Allāh the Exalted and Glorified.

“O Salmān and Jundab! Our dead do not die, our hidden ones are never hidden, and those of us who are slain are never slain.

“O Salmān and Jundab! I am the prince of every believing man and woman, of all those who have passed and all those who remain. I am helped by the Glorious Spirit. Yet indeed I am only a servant of Allāh from Allāh’s servants. Do not call us gods, but say what you will in our praise. None of you can understand the bounty of our inner reality, the bounty Allāh has instilled in us. No, not even a tenth of a tenth could be understood.

“This is because we are the Signs of Allāh and His Indicators, the Proofs of Allāh and his Regents, His Trustees and His Imāms. We are the Face of Allāh, the Eye of Allāh, and the Tongue of Allāh. Through us, Allāh punishes His servants, and through us he rewards them. He has purified us from amongst His creations, chosen us, and selected one. And if anybody says: “Why? How? For what?” Then he has disbelieved and committed polytheism, because He is not asked about what He does, but indeed they are the ones who shall be asked...

“O Salmān and Jundab! I give life and I give death by the command of my Lord. I can tell you that which you have eaten and that which is stored in your houses, by the permission of my Lord. I know the minds and the hearts, and I know the Imāms from my children, may peace be upon them. I know what they know and do, and if they love something or desire something, for we are all one. The first of us is Muḥammad, the middle of us is Muḥammad, and the last of us is Muḥammad. So do not make any separations between us. If we will something, Allāh wills it. If we hate something, Allāh hates. Woe upon whomever denies our praises and uniqueness, and to whoever denies what Allāh, our Lord, has given us. For whoever denies

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<sup>471</sup> The mystical “initiator” par excellence. See Corbin *Alone* 53-67 and Dussaud 129-135.

anything which Allāh has given us, then He has denied the power of Allāh the Exalted and Glorified, and denied His Will for us.

“O Salmān and Jundab! Allāh, our Lord, has given us something more Exalted, Glorious, High, and Great than any thing of which I have said”. Salmān and Abū Dharr said: “O Prince of the Believers, what could Allāh have given that is more Glorious and Exalted than all that you have said?” ‘Alī said: “Our Lord, the Exalted and Glorified, has given us the knowledge of the Most Glorious Name, with which we could incinerate the heavens and the earths and the Paradise and Hell. With it we rise to the heavens, and with it we sink to the earth. With it we go East and with it we go West, and with it we reach the Throne where we sit between the Hands of God the Exalted and Glorified, and He has given us everything, even the heavens and earth, the sun, the moon, and the stars, the mountains and the trees, the animals and the oceans, the paradise and Hell. Allāh has given all of this to us through the Most Glorious Name which He has taught us and made special for us. Yet with all of this, we eat and we drink, we walk in the markets and we work these things by the command of our Lord. We are the Ennobled Servants of God, whom none may proceed by statement, and whom, by His Command, do their work.”<sup>472</sup>

This narration, as it is written here, does not seem to occur in any earlier books of *ḥadīths*. Al-Majlisī says that his father had found it, oddly enough, amongst the *ḥadīths* dealing with the manumission of slaves. Al-Majlisī says that it encompasses a number of other *ḥadīths*, and so like *Khuṭbat al-Bayān* it is probably a mere synthesis of a wide variety of other *ḥadīths*.<sup>473</sup> The particular version of this narration has an incomplete (*marfūʿ*) *isnād* going to Muḥammad ibn Saqdah, who is said to have been a companion of Imām Mūsā. Some *rijāl* scholars have presented narrations establishing him as a reliable narrator, though Ayatullāh Khūʾī says that these very same narrations are weak from a number of perspectives, and so he is not prepared to certify him.<sup>474</sup> We do not see him accused of any deviancy with regards to extremism or *ghuluww*, and al-Majlisī seems fairly confident about the narration even though he includes it in his section of rare *ḥadīths* concerning the *Faḍāʾil* of the Imāms.

In this narration, we see many of the same themes in *Khuṭbat al-Bayān*. ‘Alī is portrayed as all-powerful and omniscient. He has the ability to destroy the entirety of the heavens and earths if he so willed. Furthermore, he explicitly identifies himself with important mystical figures from the past, including Jesus and the mysterious Khidr, the “initiator” or “teacher” of Moses referred to in the Qurʾān’s *Surat al-Kahf*. Unlike *Khuṭbat al-Bayān*, however, this *ḥadīth* seems far more hesitant with regards to the deification of the Imāms. One can see how the ecstatic praise of the Imām is suddenly

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<sup>472</sup> *Bihār* 26:6-15.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>474</sup> al-Khūʾī 11004.

stopped by ‘Alī’s specific denial of Divinity: “Do not call us gods, but say whatever else you will in our praise”. And yet this denial is highly ambiguous given the tenor of the remainder of the *ḥadīth*, where omnipotence, omniscience, and eternity are all predicated upon the Imām. Many of the same powers referred to in *Khuṭbat al-Bayān* are re-iterated here, such as the lines:

O Salmān and Jundab! I am the one who carried Noah in his boat by the command of my Lord. I am the one who brought Jonah from the belly of the fish by the command of my Lord. I am the one who brought Mūsā son of ‘Imran through the sea by the command of my Lord. I am the one who took Abraham from the fire by the command of my Lord. I am the one who flows their rivers, opens the wells, and plants the trees, by the command of my Lord. Everyday I heard the words of the hypocrites and tyrants, and understand their languages. I am Khidr, the teacher of Moses. I was the teacher of Solomon the son of David. I am Dhu al-Qarnayn. I am the Power of Allāh the Exalted and Glorified.

As has been stated, the most fundamental kind of *ghuluww* is to attribute things to ‘Alī that are supposed to be for God alone. And yet here we see many of the most important Qur’ānic stories (the stories Noah, Jonah, and Abraham) about God and his prophets predicated to ‘Alī instead. Even though the Qur’ānic narrative presents God as being the one who delivers Abraham from the fire, here ‘Alī says it was he. Furthermore, the statement beginning with the words “I am the one who flows the rivers...” is nearly identical to the *ḥadīth* cited in the Nuṣayrī catechism, above. This particular statement does not seem to occur in any of the truly early *ḥadīth* books written during or near the Short Occultation period, but the sixth-century *hijrī* book, *al-Manāqib* of Muḥammad ibn Sharh Aṣhūb al-Māzandarānī contains a nearly identical set of formulations as found in the *ḥadīth* of Luminous Knowledge. It is probably this *ḥadīth* that the sermon of Luminous Knowledge was partially drawn from. The relevant part reads:

I am the one who fixes the mountains of the earth, and opens its wells, and flows its rivers, and plants its trees, and grows its fruits, and spread the clouds. I send out its thunder, and illuminate its lightning. I brighten the stars, and bring forth the moon. I fix the stars, and I am the ever expansive ocean, and I place the pegs of the earth. I cast the orbits of the heavens. I illuminate the sun. I am the side of Allāh, and the word of Allāh, and the *heart* of Allāh, and the gate of Allāh. Whoever enters this gate in prostration, I will forgive him his sins, and I will aid the righteous. Through me, the Hour will come, and within me the evil doers are destroyed. I am the First, and the Last. I am the Manifest, and the Hidden, and I know all.<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>475</sup> al-Manāqib 3:387.

It would seem that the *ḥadīth* cited in the Nuṣayrī catechism (above), where ‘Alī is said to have declared from the pulpit his own divinity, is most likely based upon this particular *ḥadīth*, though the reference to the specific historical incident (i.e., the preaching of this sermon from the pulpit, presumably the pulpit of the Kūfah mosque) does not appear in the early Imāmī *ḥadīth* literature.

It would appear that part of the Luminous Knowledge sermon is, in large part, an edited version of this particular *ḥadīth*. Amir-Moezzi considers many of these later sermons to be apocryphal as well, given the sometimes highly advanced philosophical and astronomical language that is used in some of the later versions of these sermons.<sup>476</sup> We would argue against this particular sermon’s authenticity on different grounds: some of the more ecstatic praises found in earlier sermons are left out, such as “I am the heart of Allāh”. Yet even though the later version of this *ḥadīth* seems more concerned with preserving the distinction between God and Creation by excluding such utterances; the early *ḥadīth* literature does not seem to share this anxiety. And so we find statements like “I am the heart of Allāh” scattered through early *ḥadīth* books, including that of *Baṣā’ir ad-Darajāt* and the *Ikhtisās* of al-Mufid, with at least five different chains of narrators.<sup>477</sup> One important example appears in Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq’s *Tawḥīd*, where ‘Alī is reported to have said (in words nearly identical to those cited above): “I am the knowledge of Allāh. I am the encompassing heart of Allāh. I am the speaking tongue of Allāh. I am the side of Allāh. I am the hand of Allāh”.<sup>478</sup> In spite of his position in Shī‘ah orthodoxy, Shaykh Aṣ-Ṣadūq seemed confident enough in the *ḥadīth* to comment upon it, and to rationalize it in a way that fits with the later Imāmī idea of the Imām as God’s manifestation in the world. He writes:

The meaning of his statement “I am the encompassing heart of Allāh” means that his heart is the one that Allāh has made a container for His Knowledge, and that he has turned (*qalaba*) ‘Alī to His Obedience. It is the heart of a creation of Allāh the Glorified and Exalted, just as he was a servant of Allāh the Exalted. And so it is said “heart of Allāh” just as it is said “servant of Allāh” or “house of Allāh” or “Paradise of Allāh” or “Hell of Allāh”.<sup>479</sup>

<sup>476</sup> Amir-Moezzi “Aspects de l’Imāmologie I” 195.

<sup>477</sup> Cf. *Baṣā’ir* 64; *Ikhtisās* 248.

<sup>478</sup> Aṣ-Ṣadūq *At-Tawḥīd* 164.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid.



In *al-Manāqib*, the author presents a very different commentary, where Imām al-Bāqir comments upon the narration cited above. A comparison of the two commentaries is instructive in this regard:

[His statements] “I am the side of Allāh and the word of Allāh” and the Heart of Allāh means that he is the Lantern of God’s Knowledge, and [His statement?] I am the gate of Allāh means “Whoever turns towards Allāh through me, Allāh will turn to him in forgiveness”.<sup>480</sup>

Here, the idea that the Imām is the being through whom God is seen is implicit. Turning towards God implies turning towards the Imām. Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq seems to have been intimidated by the import of the *ḥadīth*, yet could not bring himself to suppress it, and so interpreted it in a far more moderate light that keeps the God/Creation distinction intact. As such, he acknowledges the narration but attempts to explain it away, hoping to forestall any *ghulāḥ* speculation on its contents. But Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq’s comments would indicate the importance that such narrations probably had in the early Imāmī Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* literature, and the difficulties he would have had in not dealing with it in a book on *tawḥīd*. We could argue, then, that even though the specific sermon of the later Sermon of Luminous Knowledge appears to be a later synthesis from this type of narration, it would seem that its theological themes (and many of the specific statements made in it) were well-known to the early Imāmī Shī‘ī community. The later narrators of this *ḥadīth* seemed to be somewhat less honest than Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq: being even more concerned with preserving the integrity of the God/Creation distinction than its earlier narrators, and so a certain amount of censorship was employed, rather than presenting the text and then using hermeneutical speculations to change its import. As such, they insert the phrase “Do not call us Gods” and the lapidary phrase “...by the permission of my Lord”, in order to downplay the deification of the Imām. Yet in earlier *ḥadīths* of the same nature these phrases do not occur, even though they can be found in other narrations in books like *al-Manāqib*.<sup>481</sup> However, in these narrations, people are accused of making the Imāms gods *alongside* of Allāh, which is of course a very different statement than to say that the Imām *is* Allāh.

The statement that the Imāms are those who, when they die, do not die, is also of eminent importance for later “extremist” theologies. This same teaching is made in a number of other

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<sup>480</sup> *al-Manāqib* Ibid.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid. 4:185.

narrations. We read in *Baṣā'ir*: "Whoever dies from us, he has not died;"<sup>482</sup> the same phrase also occurs in *Nahj al-Balāgh*.<sup>483</sup> There is also the famous narration of *al-Kāfi* "The *ḥujjat* exists before the Creation, and with the Creation, and after the Creation".<sup>484</sup> All of these narrations seem to be explicit with regards to a docetic understanding of the Imāms; the physical being who comes into being and dies at a certain point in history is merely an illusory type form.<sup>485</sup> As discussed above, part of the Nuṣayrī mystical ascent is learning to see that this form is something merely illusory, and to pass beyond it towards an absolute unity with the Divine Meaning.<sup>486</sup> Since this applies generally the entire physicality of the Imām, it most especially applies to his death; as such, the martyrdom of the Imāms is not really a martyrdom, nor is it even really a death. For sects like the Nuṣayrīs, it is obvious that the Imām, being God Himself, cannot possibly die; and so the docetic understanding of their deaths could be seen as merely an extension of the deification of the Imāms. However, the reverse is also true. The fact that the Imāms seem to have taught that they never truly die, that any perception of their death is merely illusory, also helps to lay the groundwork for the belief that they are, in fact, God: eternity, immortality, and the impossibility of destruction are all eminently Divine attributes, and yet they are explicitly applied to the Imāms in these narrations.

Beyond the fact that 'Alī's denial of Divinity appears to contradict the spirit of the rest of the Luminous Knowledge *ḥadīth*, and the fact that the earlier sources of this *ḥadīth* do not contain any such denials, there is also another odd aspect to his denial that we should examine. He uses the word *arbāb*, which is the plural of *rabb* and literally meaning Lords, and so he states "Do not call us Lords". As was discussed in the second chapter, one of the *ghulāh* sects that followed from Abū al-Khaṭṭāb was said to specifically refer to Imām Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq as their Lord (*rabb*) and for this reason they are cursed as deviants by al-'Aṣharī and others.<sup>487</sup> Yet in the authoritative early *tafsīr* of al-Qummī, we see the word *rabb* used explicitly to describe the Imām. Commenting upon the verse: "And the earth will be illuminated by the Light of its Lord (*rabb*)"<sup>488</sup> Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq is reported to

<sup>482</sup> *Baṣā'ir* 275.

<sup>483</sup> *Nahj al-Balāgh* Sermon 87.

<sup>484</sup> Cf. Moezzi 125.

<sup>485</sup> The continual manifestation of 'Alī in successive forms is one of the most common themes. In addition to being a principal teaching of the Nuṣayrīs, it was also an important teaching of their arch-rivals amongst the "extremists", the Ishaqiyun. Cf. Halm "Das Buch der Schatten" 246.

<sup>486</sup> Bar-Asher and Kofsky 24.

<sup>487</sup> See chapter one.

<sup>488</sup> 39:69.

have said: “The Lord of the Earth is the Imām of the Earth”.<sup>489</sup> As has been stated, the *tafsīr* of al-Qummī plays a very important part in the Shī‘ah juristic tradition, because the author explicitly states that *every* narration contained in the book comes from reliable sources.<sup>490</sup> For this reason, we often find that many *ḥadīth* narrators who have not been specifically classified as reliable by the scholars of ‘*ilm Ar-rijāl*, are classified as authoritative merely because they appear in the chains of narration of al-Qummī’s *tafsīr*.

As such, we find a highly authoritative Shī‘ah work specifically referring to the Imām as *rabb*, and this would seem to directly contradict Imām ‘Alī’s specific injunction to not refer to the Imāms as Lords. ‘Alī’s prohibition on referring to the Imāms as Lords is also a bit strange given the fact that even minor figures in the Qur’ān are referred to as *rabb*: the Egyptian master to whom the prophet Joseph was enslaved is referred to as Joseph’s *rabb*,<sup>491</sup> and there is nothing essentially Divine implied by the word. One could easily ask, then: if it is permissible for God to refer to Joseph’s master as *rabb*, why would it be wrong to refer to ‘Alī as one? One could argue that this statement “Do not call us Lords” was a later fabrication (the specific phrase does not seem to occur in any early *ḥadīth* literature), or that it was something uttered in *taqīyyah*, as an act of “religious dissimulation. There could also be some importance in the use of the plural. Perhaps the point ‘Alī was making was that one should not refer to the Imāms as a plurality of Lords, in the way of a polytheistic pantheon. This is because, ultimately, this *ḥadīth* seems to affirm that the Prophets and Imāms are “one light”, a teaching that is referred to in many places,<sup>492</sup> as well as this particular *ḥadīth*. It is also probable that the statement “Do not call us Lords” was meant to read: “Do not call us Lord *alongside* of Allāh”, for it is in this fashion that we find the deification of the Imāms condemned in most other *ḥadīths*. This latter formulation does not *eo ipso* exclude the teaching that the Imāms are Divinity manifest in human form; it only excludes the idea that the Imāms are divinities *alongside* the Divinity of Allāh.

### Eternal Imāmah

Once this idea is understood, namely that the Imāms are merely the manifestation of “one Light” throughout temporal history, we might begin to understand how the idea of “transmigration”

<sup>489</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 181.

<sup>490</sup> al-Qummī 1:4.

<sup>491</sup> 12:23

<sup>492</sup> Moosa 51-57.

(*tanāsukh*) came to be associated with the *ghulāh*. In the second chapter, we have seen how a number of so-called *ghulāh* sects are accused of believing in such a transmigration (such as the sect of ‘Abdallāh ibn Mu’awiyah and ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Umar).<sup>493</sup> Specifically, ‘Abdallāh ibn Mu’awiyah is accused of believing that the Divine Spirit was implanted in Adam, and that this Light passed on throughout the ages. Bayān ibn Sama’ān, as well, was accused of believing in such an Incarnation, and that the Divine Light had passed to him from his spiritual predecessor, Ibn al-Ḥanafiyyah, though Tucker disputes this and argues that he only claimed prophecy.<sup>494</sup> It is the passing of this particular Light that constitutes transmigration; yet this is hardly an extremist idea in the Islamic context. The Qur’ān is explicit that God breathed His Spirit into Adam; and the idea that the Imāms are a continual recapitulation of a primordial Light occurs throughout the Shī‘ah *ḥadīth* literature. Such an idea could easily be mistaken for a belief in reincarnation. As discussed briefly, one of the striking features of the Luminous Knowledge *ḥadīth* is the positing of an eternity of the Imām, beyond the limits of time and space. We see this teaching manifested where ‘Alī identifies himself with many *past* historical or mythological figures. Perhaps the most important statement in this regard is: “I am Khidr, the teacher of Moses”. Once again, this is not a teaching unique to the Luminous Knowledge sermon. Elsewhere, ‘Alī is seen to identify himself with other figures of great spiritual importance. In another Imāmī *ḥadīth*, he says to the Christians: “I am he whose name in the Gospel is Elijah”.<sup>495</sup> Corbin also quotes the following Ismā‘īlī narration: “I am the Christ who cures the blind and the lepers. I am he and he is I”.<sup>496</sup> There are many narrations of this type, where ‘Alī is presented as being universal and eternal in his Luminous Form.<sup>497</sup> The same idea is presented about the other Imāms as well, and this would fit in with the overall pattern: *all* of the Imāms are presented as being nothing but physical manifestations of one, primordial reality. A *ḥadīth* about the re-appearance of the Twelfth Imām is also instructive in this regard. Sachedina cites it in his important study *Islamic Messianism*. It is said that, when he reappears, he will be leaning against the Ka’bah and will recite the following words:

<sup>493</sup> Cf. Bayhom-Daou “Ghulāh” 17.

<sup>494</sup> Tucker “Bayān” 247.

<sup>495</sup> Qtd. in Corbin, *Alone* 58.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

<sup>497</sup> Corbin *Cyclical* 68-72.

Truly, anyone who wishes to see Adam and Seth, should know that I am that Adam and Seth. Anyone who wishes to see Noah and his son Shem, should know that I am that Noah and Shem. Anyone who wishes to see Abraham and Ishmael, should know that I am that Abraham and Ishmael. Anyone who wishes to see Moses and Joshua should know that I am that Moses and Joshua. Anyone who wishes to see Jesus and Simon, should know that I am that Jesus and Simon. Anyone who wishes to see Muḥammad and ‘Alī, the Prince of the Believers, should know that I am that Muḥammad and ‘Alī. Anyone who wishes to see al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, should know that I am that al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. Anyone who wishes to see the Imāms from the descendents of al-Ḥusayn, should know that I am those pure Imāms. Accept my call and assemble near me so that I will inform you whatever you wish to know. Anyone who has read the heavenly scriptures and divine scrolls, will now hear them from me.<sup>498</sup>

Imāmāh, then, is not limited to the physical reality of the Imāms, but rather extends throughout all periods of temporal history. Acknowledging this essential and luminous *walāyah* was as much of an obligation to the believers of the past as it is in the present. This is borne out in another body of narrations. In another mystical exegesis of the Qur’ān, found in the same *Baṣā’ir ad-Darajāt* of As-Saffar al-Qummī, deals with the primordial pact referred to in the Qur’ān, where Allāh is said to have taken a covenant with all the “children of Adam” to bear witness to his Lordship. The interpretation of the Imāms goes a step further. In addition to the basic covenant for the Lordship of God, an added covenant was taken with regards to the prophethood of Muḥammad and the sainthood of ‘Alī. As-Saffar al-Qummī cites Imām al-Bāqir as saying:

Indeed, Allāh the Blessed and Exalted created the Universe...He took a covenant upon the Prophets. He said: “Am I not your Lord?” Then He said: “[Do you bear witness] that this Muḥammad is the Prophet of Allāh, and that this ‘Alī is the Prince of Believers?” They said: “Yes, indeed!” And so it was then that their prophethood was confirmed.<sup>499</sup>

As such, it is most likely that the “extremist” idea of transmigration was rooted in this specific idea of the Imām’s Light radiating throughout eternity, and re-appearing in various theophanic forms at different ages. This doctrine has a firm basis in the Shī‘ah *ḥadīth* literature, and so it is difficult to regard its (alleged) explication by people like ‘Abdallāh ibn Mu‘awiyah and ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Umar ibn Harb as being truly deviant.

<sup>498</sup> Qtd in Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism* 163.

<sup>499</sup> Ṣubḥānī *Buḥūth* 25; Tucker 247-248.

As Ḥaṣim ‘Uthmān points out, narrations in this regard are very famous and are reported in *ḥadīth* collections such as the *Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal and the *Faḍā’il* of Khwārazmī. This includes the famous *ḥadīth* of the Prophet:

I and ‘Alī were one Light, between the hands of Allāh the Exalted, before He created Creation. When He created Adam, this Light continued to pass through Adam’s loins, and this Light did not separate until it reached the loins of ‘Abd al-Mutallib [‘Alī’s grandfather].<sup>500</sup>

This *ḥadīth* speaks about the transmigration of the Prophet and ‘Alī’s light from being to being, until it finally became manifested. The idea is hardly unique to the Shī‘ah, but seems to have formed an important part of early Imāmī Shī‘ī faith in the Imāms. It posits the Imāms as basically eternal entities, not limited by the normal confines of time and space. The physicality of the Imāms seems, primarily, to be docetic: while the uninitiated perceive the Imām as a mere human being, the true believers are aware of his luminous and eternal status.

### Conclusions

What these narrations make clear is that the Imāms were regarded, by a significant number of their followers, as being far more than mere human beings. Firstly, they are endowed with a unique ontological position that makes them “luminous beings”, above and beyond normal physical existence, endowed with a special portion of Divinity that is theirs and theirs alone. Furthermore, they have a cosmogenic and cosmological function. Part of their superiority over “normal” human beings is the belief that the universe was created *by* and *from* them, a power granted and “delegated” to them by the Transcendent Godhead. Their role, then, is primarily as a bridge between the world of the Divine, which is talked about in absolutely “agnostic” terms throughout the early Imāmī Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* literature, and the temporal world. The Godhead is absolutely exalted beyond human conception. The Imāms seem to have prohibited the type of speculative and dialectical theology (*kalām*) that was common at the time, in favour of the doctrine of Imāmate which makes the Imām the one who “connects heaven and earth”.

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<sup>500</sup> ‘Uthmān *Alawīyyun* 61.

As such, the Imām functions as a kind of *avatār* in this belief system, a Divine theophany, fulfilling a position analogous to the Gurū of traditional Sikhism. In all of this, the distinction between God and Imām becomes highly blurred. Divinity is affirmed in some respects, denied in others. Within the early body of *ḥadīths*, everything except an open assertion of the Imām's Divinity is made. They are the Creators of heaven and earth; they are God's "organs" (His Face, His Hand, His Eye, etc.); they are His Attributes and His Signs; they are omniscient, and omnipotent, and eternal. As has been noted by scholars like Amir-Moezzi, the only thing "beyond" the Imām is the *Theos Agnostos*, the unknowable Godhead who is beyond name, attribute, or any predication. It seems that, if one were to try and distinguish between the early *ghulāh* and the "mainstream" Shī'ah community, it is only on this point. The mainstream community (as epitomized by such celebrated jurists as al-Kulaynī) seems to have held that while the Imām is in some way Divine, he is not co-identical with the Godhead, the Absolute Essence of God, who is by definition unknowable and, therefore, unrevealed. The "extremist" sects seem to have made this "jump", by arguing that the Imām is the Godhead; but even then, how this was to be understood is usually left up in the air.

With the doctrine of the Imām's "noble attributes" as a basis, we can now move on to one of the subsidiary doctrines of early Imāmī mysticism: the Prophet's companions, and the belief in antinomianism and the non-incumbency of the *sharī'ah*. It will be argued that both of these doctrines are themselves based upon the view of Imāmate discussed above, which gives precedence to a theophanic *person* over "institutions" such as a Revealed Law or Book. The Qumm school are decidedly *not* antinomians; the vast majority of their literature is legal related, and nowhere do they make any implications that knowledge of the Imām absolves one of following the *sharī'ah*. Nonetheless, some of the key figures that we have discussed in earlier chapters (like al-Mufaḍḍal ibn 'Umar) are continually accused of antinomianism, and so it behooves us to look through the Imāmī *ḥadīth* and *rijāl* literature to see how these accusations are made, and to see where there are any overlaps between the antinomian mystical tendency and that of the Qumm school. Then we will look at the status of the Qur'ān in the Imāmī literature.

## Antinomianism

One of the most characteristic attributes of the *ghulāh* is a belief in *ibāḥah*, or the non-obligation of following the *sharī'ah*. This belief is intimately linked with some elements of the Imāmology discussed before. Once the Imām is posited as a supreme theophanic and soteriological figure, the being through whom God becomes known, "knowledge" of the Imām takes a certain precedence over the normative injunctions of the *sharī'ah*. What seems to be at work here is a tension between a person and an institution, where faith in the former has a tendency to eclipse the latter. There is no doubt that almost all of the sects dubbed as *ghulāh* are also accused of believing in *ibāḥah*.<sup>501</sup> In most literature on the 'Alawīs, antinomianism is cited as one of their premier beliefs.<sup>502</sup> As an extension of their antinomian stance, we see that they are often accused of participating in sodomy, incest, and other behaviours, though Nimier and others argue that such accusations are probably the fantasies and imaginations of sectarian detractors.<sup>503</sup> Corbin also notes the frequency of such accusations, invariably leveled against antinomianists.<sup>504</sup>

In the early period, we have seen that antinomianism is specifically associated with the sect of 'Abdallāh ibn Mu'awiyah, whom al-'Asharī accuses of legitimating various prohibited substances.<sup>505</sup> The same accusation was made against a number of other groups. As stated, the soundness of al-'Asharī's survey is open to great doubt; but it is fairly certain that many of the sects that are dubbed as *ghulāh* have a firm and definite belief in some kind of *sharī'ah* abrogation. Al-Baghdādī writes about the *ghulāh*:

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<sup>501</sup> Bayhom-Daou "Ghulāh" 17.

<sup>502</sup> Nimier 18. So much so that the Nuṣayrīs are said to not even have any mosques in their villages. Cf. Halm "Das Buch der Schatten II" 79.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid. 19.

<sup>504</sup> Corbin *History* 183-184.

<sup>505</sup> See introduction.



As far as the *ghulāh* of the Shī‘ah (like the sects of Bayān, al- Mughīrah, Janahan, Maṣūr, Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, and the Incarnationists), who deify the Imāms and make permissible all that is forbidden in the *shar‘ah*, and deny the obligations and follow their teachings, they are not Muslims, even if Islam might sometimes be attributed to them.<sup>506</sup>

The language that al-Baghdādī uses is important: a direct connection between the deification of the Imāms and *ibāḥah* is established, and so the two ideas are seen as going hand in hand. We have also seen how external adherence to the *sharī‘ah* saved the life of the *ḥadīth* narrator Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Urama al-Qummī, when the people of Qumm wanted to murder him because they had heard that he had narrated esoteric (*bāṭinī*) *ḥadīths*.<sup>507</sup> While it is difficult to evaluate whether or not the early *ghulāh* sects believed in *ibāḥah*, there is no doubt that later ‘Alawī sects and other groups dubbed as *ghulāh* by mainstream Sunnī and Shī‘ah orthodoxy do not follow the same kind of *sharī‘ah* as other Muslims do. The Ahl-i Ḥaqq, for example, make this difference a major point of separation between them and other Muslim communities. Instead of the canonical five daily prayers (the *ṣalāh*, known in Fārsī as *namāz*), they engage in a regular supplicatory dialogue with God that they refer to in Fārsī as *niyāz*. As such, other Muslim communities are referred to as the *ahl-e namāz*, the people of the *namāz*, while they refer to themselves as the *ahl-e niyāz*, the people of *niyāz*.<sup>508</sup> What is important here is that a distinction is made between those who follow the “orthodox” *sharī‘ah* and those who do not, and the Muslims that commit themselves to following the injunctions of that Law are cast as Other. Just as heresiographists like al-Baghdādī or al-‘Asharī, then, use the issue of *ibāḥah* as a means of defining, classifying, and separating the *ghulāh* sects, the *ghulāh* sects seem to respond in kind.

Hodgson presents three ways in which Shī‘ah antinomianism took form during this period:<sup>509</sup>

- 1) The first is out-and-out antinomianism. There simply is no such thing as the *sharī‘ah* for the true believers, who because of their knowledge of the Imām are able to transcend its dictates.
- 2) The second is the idea that the dictates of the *sharī‘ah* are all subject to *ta‘wīl*, i.e., esoteric interpretation. The various rites that are legislated therein stand for higher spiritual realities. Once

<sup>506</sup> Qtd. in Ṣubḥānī *Baḥth* 10.

<sup>507</sup> An-Najāshī 329.

<sup>508</sup> Mir-Hosseini 218.

<sup>509</sup> Hodgson 7.

one understands these realities, then there is no longer any need to follow external forms. For those less spiritually mature, the external forms remain obligatory for them.

3) The third is the idea of forgiveness. The *sharī'ah* is incumbent on all, but those who “know their Imām” will be forgiven for their transgressions.<sup>510</sup>

The first idea appears to be associated with the sects of ‘Abdallāh ibn Mu’awiyah and ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Umar ibn Ḥarb, and Tucker argues that Bayān ibn Sam’ān was one of the first to introduce such ideas.<sup>511</sup> ‘Abdallāh ibn Mu’awiyah is also explicitly accused of believing this by An-Nawbakhtī as well. His followers are said to have believed that anybody who knows their Imām can set aside whatever they will from the *sharī'ah*.<sup>512</sup> Probably the most famous accusation of this nature was directed towards the Ḥanafid *ghālī* Ḥamza ibn ‘Umārah, who was said to have married his own daughter.<sup>513</sup> This, it is said, was allowed because, once again, anybody who knows their Imām could dispense with the *sharī'ah* as he pleased (it is important Nawbakhtī uses this phrase repeatedly). It is stated in al-Kashshī’s *Rijāl* that Bayān, Mufaḍḍal, and others used to report *ḥadīths* from Imām Ja’far aṣ-Ṣādiq that knowledge of the Imām was sufficient for fulfilling obligations like fasting and prayer.<sup>514</sup> It is interesting that the person making the accusation (Yahyā ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Hamānī) is doing so in an attempt to defend the integrity of the Imāms. He argues that people were accusing the Imāms of being weak in *ḥadīth* (and Islam in general) because they had heard such narrations, and concluded that the Imāms were libertines.<sup>515</sup>

The heavy emphasis given to knowledge and love of the “Imām of the Age” is a theme that, as we have seen, is reflected throughout the early *ḥadīth* literature. It is this incredible emphasis on the soteriological function of “knowing one’s Imām” that may help to understand how antinomianism emerged amongst so many early Imāmī Shī’ī, in spite of the extensive juristic literature that was being formed during this time. Devotion of the Imāms, over and above the obligation of following the religious law, seems to be clear in the following *ḥadīth* of al-Kashshī. It recounts a particularly

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<sup>510</sup> This is quite a common view amongst the Shī’ah. Cf. Kohlberg *Belief* 7.

<sup>511</sup> Tucker “Bayān” 251.

<sup>512</sup> An-Nawbakhtī 32.

<sup>513</sup> Tucker Ibid. 242; An-Nawbakhtī 28.

<sup>514</sup> al-Kashshī 324-325.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid.

interesting story concerning Mufaḍḍal ibn ‘Umar. Importantly enough, it is narrated by Muḥammad ibn Sinān, one of those accused of “extremism” in the *rijāl* literature.<sup>516</sup>

A group of people from Kūfah wrote to aṣ-Ṣādiq, and said: “al-Mufaḍḍal is sitting with scoundrels, people of the bathhouses, and people who drink alcohol. You should write to him and tell him not to sit with them”. And so aṣ-Ṣādiq wrote a letter to al-Mufaḍḍal, sealed it, and gave it to the people. He ordered that they should give the letter to al-Mufaḍḍal. So the people came with the letter and presented it to al-Mufaḍḍal; this group included Zurārah, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Bakir, Muḥammad ibn Muslim, Abū Baṣīr, and Hijr ibn Za’idah. They gave the letter to al-Mufaḍḍal, who opened it and read it. Written in it was ‘In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Buy such and such items’. It has not been mentioned whether these things were to be purchased in a small or large quantity. When he finished reading it, al-Mufaḍḍal gave it to Zurārah, and Zurārah gave it to Muḥammad ibn Muslim, until it circulated amongst all the people. And so al-Mufaḍḍal said: “What do you have to say about this?” They said: “This is an enormous sum of money. Even if we search, join together, and try to bring all of this money together, we will not be able to reach it”. They wanted to be exempted from it. He said: “Do it, even if it takes you until tomorrow morning”. And so he kept them until the next day. He turned towards his companions, those who were working amongst them. They came to him and he read them the book of Aṣ-Ṣādiq. The ones who were with him went out, and he kept the others that they would be with him until morning. The young men finally returned, and carried whatever they could. They presented two thousand *dinars* and ten thousand *dirhams*, bringing it all before these people had finished their breakfast. Al-Mufaḍḍal then said: “You wish that I would expel these people from my presence, thinking that Allāh has some need for your prayers and fasting”.<sup>517</sup>

Other narrations indicating al-Mufaḍḍal’s antinomian inclinations can be found in the same text:

Ishāq ibn ‘Amār reports: “We set out intending to make pilgrimage to the grave of Ḥusayn, and we said: ‘Maybe if we go to Abū ‘Abdillāh al-Mufaḍḍal’s house, and so he ordered for his donkey to be taken out, and he rode out with us. Dawn broke [i.e., that the time of *fajr* began while they were on the journey] while we were twelve miles from Kūfah. We set down and prayed, but al-Mufaḍḍal waited, did not come down, and did not pray. And so we said: ‘O Abū ‘Abdillāh, you haven’t prayed?’ To which he said: ‘I prayed before I left the house’”.<sup>518</sup>

<sup>516</sup> He also plays a pivotal role in the Nuṣayrī system; Halm argues that he is largely responsible for passing on the “heretical” Gnostic traditions of al-Mufaḍḍal ibn ‘Umar amongst the Nuṣayrīs, as well as al-Mufaḍḍal’s last testament. In their literature he is praised as a great master. Nonetheless, it is also said in some of the *rijāl* works that he repented for his “lies” on his deathbed, which seems a clear attempt to try and discredit the enormous body of narrations attributed to him. Cf. Halm “Das Buch I 238-239.

<sup>517</sup> al-Kashshī 327.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid 325; the implication is that since the time for *fajr* had begun while they were on the journey, there was no way al-Mufaḍḍal could have actually prayed *fajr* in the proper way before he left the house.

The point of this story seems to be that, in spite of the immorality of the people involved, they were willing to bring all their wealth together for the Imām when asked. In a sense, they are presented as true believers in spite of their libertinism, while the “pious” amongst them (such as Zurārah) are viewed as people who, in spite of their outward conformity to the Law, are devoid of true belief. The fact that Zurārah is mentioned so much in the story is also telling, since we have seen previously that he did not have any real belief in the knowledge or infallibility of the Imāms. This particular *ḥadīth* would seem to fall into the third type of antinomianism mentioned by Hodgson: i.e., the idea that the practice of Islamic law is obligatory, but that those who are truly devoted to their Imāms will be forgiven. We have seen how the early *ḥadīth* literature posits ‘Alī as being the King of the Day of Judgment and the one who apportions heaven and Hell. This theme occurs in a large number of *ḥadīths*, and it is not hard to see how some early Imāmī Shī‘ī would have come to the conclusion that love of ‘Alī suffices in place of the *sharī‘ah*. Of course none of these narrations are specific in this regard; but it can be of no surprise that some would have interpreted them in an antinomian light. These narrations include:

No one will enter Paradise except those who acknowledge them [the Imāms], and no one will enter Hell except he who denies them.<sup>519</sup>

The Prophet said to ‘Alī: You, O ‘Alī, and the inheritors from your off-spring are the Heights<sup>520</sup> of Allāh, lying between the Paradise and Hell. No one will enter Paradise except he who knows you and he whom you know, and no one will enter Hell except he who denies you, and whom you deny.<sup>521</sup>

No one from the first generations or the last will enter the paradise except he who loves him [‘Alī], and no one will enter Hell except those who hate him. As such, he is the one who will apportion heaven and Hell.<sup>522</sup>

On the Day of Judgment, a man will rise up, and two angels will appear on his left and his right. The one on the right will say: “O people of Creation! This is ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. He will enter into Paradise whoever he wills”. And the angel on the left will call: “O people of Creation! This is ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. He will enter into Hell whoever he wills”.<sup>523</sup>

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<sup>519</sup> *Nahj al-Balāgh* 214.

<sup>520</sup> An esoteric interpretation of the verses 7:46-49.

<sup>521</sup> *al-Manāqib* 2:233.

<sup>522</sup> Aṣ-Ṣadūq *‘Ilal* 1:161.

<sup>523</sup> *Basā’ir* 415.

‘Alī said: “I am the one who apportions heaven and Hell. Those who love will enter Paradise, and those who are my enemies will enter Hell”.<sup>524</sup>

‘Alī said: “I am Allāh’s apportioner of heaven and Hell. No one will enter them except they will be of two groups, and I am the great divider”.<sup>525</sup>

From what exists of the “400 sources”, we read:

‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn [the fourth Imām] said: If a man lived for as long as Noah did amongst his people, 950 years, and fasted everyday and stood every night in prayer, and met Allāh without accepting our *walāyah*, none of these works will benefit him at all.<sup>526</sup>

The idea that the *sharī‘ah* is not important for the “true believers” is not made explicit anywhere in the Shī‘ah *ḥadīth* literature. This is the strongest evidence that it was a minority position, since if antinomianism had been as prevalent as the “extremist” Imāmology, we would expect this to be reflected somewhere in the *ḥadīth* of the period. Yet, in light of these narrations, it cannot be said to be a purely *ghulāh* idea, in spite of the way that it has been used as a shibboleth in inter-Shī‘ah sectarian debates. The seeds of such an idea can be found in the entire way that *walāyah* is given precedence over *nubuwwah*, a teaching that was advocated by Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Ju‘ifi. It is not hard to see how, for many Shī‘ahs, the spiritual functions of the Imām would eclipse his function as a lawgiver, and the ritual obedience to Islamic law would seem increasingly less important.<sup>527</sup> In spite of the vast number of law-related *ḥadīths* attributed to the Twelve Imāms, it would seem that in the early period of Shī‘ism there were a number of Shī‘ahs who did not believe that such laws were incumbent upon them: this being a special dispensation for knowing and recognizing their Imām. As always, the primary obligation was seen as knowing and recognizing one’s Imām; all other issues remained basically unimportant. Certainly, the early “mainstream” *ḥadīth* literature gives a *precedence* to Imāmate and *walāyah* over other acts of worship, though not an exclusive one:

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<sup>524</sup> Ibid.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid.

<sup>526</sup> Mustafavi 22.

<sup>527</sup> Daftary *Ismā‘īlīs* 67.

Anybody who struggles to worship Allāh on his own and does not have an Imām from Allāh, then none of his works will be accepted...If such a person dies in this state, they will die the death of a disbeliever and hypocrite.<sup>528</sup>

The summit and crest of the Command, its key, the door to all things and the pleasure of the Merciful, is obedience to the Imām after knowledge has been obtained of him. If there was a man who stood up for prayer in the night, and fasted all during the day, and gave away all his wealth as charity, and made the pilgrimage during all of life, and yet he did not know the *walāyah* of the *wālī Allāh*, such that he takes such a person as his guardian and confirms all of his worship to him, then there is no obligation for Allāh to reward him, nor is such a person from the people of faith.<sup>529</sup>

*Walāyah*, then, is given prime importance, as many commentators on Shī'ism have noticed. Lalani argues that Imām al-Bāqir made devotion and love of the Imāms the most important pillar of Islam, the "pivot" around which all other obligations (prayer, fasting, etc.) revolve.<sup>530</sup>

The second idea, that the dictates of the *sharī'ah* are subject to an esoteric *ta'wīl* which, once known, allows one to dispense with the external forms, seems to be mainly associated with Abū al-Khaṭṭāb. He is said to have believed that all rituals of the *sharī'ah* merely represent, allegorically, some other type of spiritual reality. In one *ḥadīth* cited in al-Kashshī's *rijāl*, we read:

Abū 'Abdillāh [aṣ-Ṣādiq] wrote to Abū al-Khaṭṭāb: I have heard that you are claiming that fornication is a man [i.e., the word fornication is only used in the *sharī'ah* as a code-word to refer to some individuals who should be avoided], and that alcohol is a man, and the *ṣalāh* is a man, and fasting, and debauchery. It is not as you have said! Indeed, I am the root of Truth, and the branch of Truth is obedience to Allāh. And the root of evil is our enemies, and their branch is debauchery. And how could anybody obey one whom one does not know, or know that which one does not obey.<sup>531</sup>

One should note that the language of the *ḥadīth*, however, is a bit odd. The latter statements, namely that "nobody could obey that which they do not know", seems unrelated to the rest of the *ḥadīth*. It would seem that the intended meaning is simply an injunction to follow the "manifest" meaning of the revealed text, and not attempt to read into it any esoteric or internal meanings (or at least not exclude the manifest meaning). Examples of later *ḥadīths* indicating upon such an "esoteric" meaning to ritual acts include:

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<sup>528</sup> *Wasā'il* 1:118.

<sup>529</sup> *Ibid* 1:119.

<sup>530</sup> Lalani 69.

<sup>531</sup> al-Kashshī 292.

The argument of those who believed in this kind of *ibāḥah*, like the Nuṣayrīs,<sup>533</sup> was that 'Alī is the reality underlying all religious works. Once this is understood, then there is no more need for these external forms, and the only worship one has to engage in is the continuous adoration of 'Alī, as either the Face of God or God Himself. The Ishāqī "extremists" argued that

The inner secret of the midday prayer (*ḡhuḥr*) is Muḥammad, because he manifested the revelation...If the inner meanings were only one's bending and prostrating, then He would not have said His Words: "The prayer forbids debauchery and evil", only a living and powerful being could actually forbid debauchery and evil.<sup>534</sup>

Other than these narrations, however, there is nothing explicit in the early Imāmī literature that countenances the abandoning of these external forms, even when their esoteric reality is realized and understood. If the Nuṣayrī theologians inherited this from early *ghulāḥ* esotericists, it was certainly dispensed with by the Qumm school *ḥadīth* narrators, who in spite of whatever other mystical speculations they were interested in, have no concept of *ta'wīl* like that of the Ismā'īlīs. These narrations are obviously very ambiguous; they could be read in one of two ways, allegorically or symbolically. When used as an argument for the non-incumbency of the *sharī'ah* upon the "True Believer;" references to *salāh*, *ḥajj*, *zakāh*, etc. are merely allegorical. The actual allegorical devices have no substantiality or reality on their own. When used as an argument in favour of the *sharī'ah*, they are more properly referred to as symbols. They stand for a reality higher than themselves, but they continue to have efficacy on their own.<sup>535</sup> The rituals of Islam, then, would be seen as having two aspects: a manifest and a hidden, but both of them are viewed as incumbent.

Purportedly, this is was the belief of the seminal Nuṣayrī theologian, al-Khaṣībī. Al-Khaṣībī is said to have stated that the *zakāh* is the recognition of the Imāmah, and that giving the *zakāh* is obedience to the Imām. Fasting is maintaining the secret of the religion, and so is intimately linked to

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<sup>532</sup> Three phrases of the *adhān*, the call to prayer.

<sup>533</sup> Dussaud 48.

<sup>534</sup> And not merely from a set of ritual acts; the meaning seems to be that the religious obligations referred to in the Qur'ān must refer to people and not the acts they seem to refer to, for otherwise it would be illogical to say that prayer prohibits debauchery. Halm "Das Buch der Schatten I" 246.

<sup>535</sup> Corbin *History* 12-13.

the idea of an esoteric *taqīyyah*.<sup>536</sup> And yet alongside this esoteric *ta'wīl* of the religious obligation, where the Divine Reality of the Imām underlies the external acts of the *sharī'ah*, it is argued that he held for the obligation of maintaining the external and the esoteric simultaneously.<sup>537</sup> Ritual acts are seen to symbolize the spiritual reality of certain persons.<sup>538</sup>

This brings the idea of the “return” to the primordial *walāyah* of ‘Alī even more important. The “original sin” of humanity was to turn away from the *walāyah* of ‘Alī, and to act with jealousy towards the Ahl al-Bayt. The following *ḥadīth* occurs in Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq’s *Ma’ānī al-Akḥbār*. ‘Abd As-Salām al-Harāwī narrates:

I said to Ar-Riḍā: “O son of the Prophet of Allāh, tell me about the tree from which Adam and Eve ate. What was it? The people disagree with each other, so some say that it was wheat, and others that it was grape, and others say that it was the tree of jealousy”. The Imām replied: “All of this is true”. I said: “So what is the significance of all these different opinions?”

The Imām then replied: “The tree of paradise takes different forms. It is wheat, but there are grapes in it, and it is not like the trees of this world. In any case, when Adam had been ennobled by Allāh the Exalted by having the angels prostrate to him and by bringing him into paradise, Adam said to himself: “Has Allāh created anybody better than me?” And Allāh the Exalted and Glorified knew what occurred inside Adam’s self, and so He called out to Adam: “Raise your heart, O Adam, and look to the legs of my Throne”. And so Adam raised his head, and gazed upon the legs of the Divine Throne. He saw written upon it: ‘There is no God but Allāh, and Muḥammad – peace and blessings be upon him and his family – is the Prophet of Allāh, and ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib is the Prince of Believers, and Fātimah is the Master of the world’s women, and Ḥasan and Ḥusayn are the masters of the youths of paradise.’

“And so Adam said: ‘O my Lord, who are these individuals?’ And so He – may He be Glorified and Exalted – said: ‘These are your off-spring Adam, and they are greater than you and all else that exists in My Creation. If it was not for them, I would not have created you, nor would I have created Hell, nor the heavens, nor the earth. So do not look upon them with the eye of jealousy, or I will expel you from my presence.

“And yet Adam did look upon them with the eye of jealousy, and desired to have their station. And so the Devil was empowered over him, until he ate the fruit of the Forbidden Tree. And the Devil was empowered over Eve, because of the jealousy she had towards Fātimah – peace be upon her, and so she ate of the Forbidden Tree as well. And so Allāh expelled them from Paradise and removed them from His Presence, and sent them down to the earth”.<sup>539</sup>

One specific *ḥadīth* about ‘Alī brings this tension to the forefront:

<sup>536</sup> ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Ḥamd 164.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid.

<sup>538</sup> Br-Kofsky and Asher 195-196.

<sup>539</sup> al-Ḥusayni 23.



When Allāh created Adam and breathed into him of His Spirit, Adam sneezed. And he said: "Praise be to Allāh". And so Allāh revealed to Him: "My Servant, you have praised Me. I swear by my Glory and Might, if it were not for servants that I wish to create from you, I would not have brought you into being. So raise up your head, and look". And so Adam raised his head up, and he saw written on the Throne: "There is no God but Allāh, and Muḥammad is the Prophet of Allāh, the Messenger of Mercy, and 'Alī is the Prince of Believers, establishing the Proof. Whoever acknowledges his right, then he is pure and good. And whoever denies him his right, then he is a disbeliever, and he has failed. I swear upon Myself, by My Glory and Might, I will bring into paradise whoever obeys him, even if he disobeys Me. And I swear upon my self, that I will enter into Hell whoever disobeys him, even if he obeys Me".<sup>540</sup>

This is, perhaps, the most surprising of narrations in this regard. Obedience to 'Alī is given precedence over obedience to God. It would seem, of course, that the language here is merely rhetorical; obviously Shī'ahs believe in the infallibility (*'isma*) of 'Alī, and so the concept of disobeying God but obeying 'Alī would be rendered moot. Even though it remains to be seen what is meant by this particular rhetorical trope, the tensions that it brings between obeying the *personage* of 'Alī over the institution of the Divinely ordained *sharī'ah* (a *sharī'ah* that is primarily established through the vehicle of prophecy, *nubuwwah*) remain obvious. This is certainly a "rare" narration; we have not been able to find any others like it. But it was included within the post-Qummī corpus of *ḥadīth*, indicating that this belief was in some kind of circulation during the early period. Interestingly enough, this *ḥadīth* is narrated by Shadhān ibn Jibrā'il al-Qummī, who is regarded as one of the most learned Shī'ah '*ulamā'*' in the sixth century *hijrī*, with an incomplete (*marfū'*) *isnād* of Muḥammad ibn Ma'sūd al-Ayyāshī. Al-'Ayyāshī is an interesting figure, given this type of narration; for it is said in the *rijāl* literature that he was originally Sunnī (*ma'āsī al-madhhab*, disobedient to the Shī'ah school of thought), but then his "eyes were opened" and he joined the Shī'ah school of thought.<sup>541</sup> He is also criticized, like al-Barqī and others who narrated these types of *ḥadīths*, for narrating from many "weak people".

Another very famous narration that brings out this tension is the *ḥadīth* where 'Alī is said to have caused the sun to rise from the West, after he had missed the canonical afternoon prayer (*ṣalāh al-'Aṣr*). The recounting of this particular story is very common at Shī'ah *majālis* (religious gatherings). Shaykh al-Mufīd cites the story in his *Kitāb al-Irshād*, a collection of *ḥadīths* concerning the biographies of the Imāms. He quotes the *ḥadīth* as follows:

<sup>540</sup> Ibid. 23.

<sup>541</sup> al-Khū'ī entry 11795.

One day the Prophet, may God bless him and his family, was in his house and ‘Alī, peace be upon him, was in front of him when Gabriel, peace be upon him, came to him to speak privately to him about God. When inspiration closed in upon him, he used the thigh of the Commander of the faithful [‘Alī] as a pillow. He did not raise his head from it until the sun had set. Thus he compelled the Commander of the faithful, peace be on him (to remain) in that position. So he prayed the afternoon prayer sitting, giving a nod (with his head) for his bowing and prostration. When (the Apostle) awoke from his trance, he said to the Commander of the faithful: “Have you missed the afternoon prayer?”

“I could not pray it standing because of your position, Apostle of God, and the circumstances of hearing inspiration which I was in”, he answered.

“Ask God to send the sun back for you so that you may pray it standing at its proper time just as (it was) when you missed being able to do it”, he told him. “God, the Exalted, will answer you because of your obedience to God and to His Apostle”.

The Commander of the faithful, peace be upon him, asked God to send back the sun. It was sent back for him so that it came into position in the sky at the time for the afternoon prayer. The Commander of the faithful, peace be upon him, prayed the afternoon prayer. The Commander of the faithful, peace be on him, prayed the prayer at its proper time. Then it set.<sup>542</sup>

The narration is, of course, interesting from a number of regards. Firstly, of course, is the miraculous power of the Imām being referred to again. The fact that it comes in the work of Shaykh al-Mufīd is telling in this regard, and it seems that in spite of al-Mufīd’s attempt to suppress such narrations, he felt that he would not be able to exclude it from his book without being untoward. First is the precedence of person over institution. It was more important for ‘Alī to not disturb the Prophet than it was for him to pray the prayer properly and on time. As such, the personage of the Prophet seems to be given emphasis over the specific obligations of the Sacred Law. It is also worth mentioning that this narration is not unknown in the Sunnī *ḥadīth* literature. Al-Mufīd quotes a number of chains for it from the Prophet’s companions, including Jābir ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī, Asmā bin ‘Umays, Umm Salmā, and Abū Sa’īd al-Khudrī.

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<sup>542</sup> al-Mufīd 261-262.

## Imāmology and the Qur'ān

### Status of the Qur'ān in the Early Imāmī Shī'ī Ḥadīth Literature

When we approach the early *ḥadīth* literature, we find a massive number of explicit references to the knowledge of the Imām concerning both the esoteric and the exoteric aspects of the Qur'ān. Though the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'ān is primarily an Ismā'īlī pursuit, the Qummī *ḥadīth* literature contains the seeds of this practice. It was not taken up by later Twelver scholars, except for the rare exception of certain Sufis, and there is a noticeable decrease in the *ḥadīth* literature concerning this in later texts. Again, none of this *ta'wīl/tafsīr* literature is treated as esoteric: it is blatantly discussed in the Qummī *ḥadīth* works. There are two main genres of *ḥadīths* concerning Imāmāh and the Qur'ān. The first consists of an attempt to link verses of the Qur'ān to the Imām in unexpected ways. In this there is a certain commonality with Ismā'īlī works like the *Kitāb al-Kashf* of Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman. The second, more specific to the early Qummī tradition, concerns *taḥrīf* in the Qur'ān. The line between the two genres is difficult to draw: there are many *ḥadīths* that explicitly state that *taḥrīf* has occurred, and other *ḥadīths* that can be interpreted as mere *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān, or an offer of variant readings.

The doctrine that the Qur'ān contains an esoteric and exoteric aspect is a core part of many of the Qummī *ḥadīths*. *Baṣā'ir ad-Darajāt* contains an entire chapter in this regard, entitled: "That the Imāms possess the entirety of the Qur'ān as it was revealed to the Prophet". It is interesting how much emphasis is laid upon this, while there is actually very little discussion in Qummī works concerning the esoteric aspect of the Qur'ān, in sharp contrast to the Ismā'īlī *ta'wīl* tradition. The relevant narrations in this chapter are as follows:

When our Resurrector [*qā'im*] has risen up, he will recite the Book of God – may He be exalted and glorified – as it should be recited, and he will unveil the Volume written by 'Alī.<sup>543</sup>

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<sup>543</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 83.

al-Bāqir said: No one can claim to have all of the Qur'ān, including its manifest aspect and hidden aspects, except the inheritors [the *'awsīyā*, the Imāms].<sup>544</sup>

al-Bāqir said: There is absolutely no one from the people that can say he has the entirety of the Qur'ān as it was revealed by Allāh except a liar; the one only who possesses it all and has preserved it as it was revealed by Allāh was 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, and the Imāms after him.<sup>545</sup>

Ibn Salāmāh reports: A man was reading the Qur'ān to Abū 'Abdillāh [aṣ-Ṣādiq], and I heard letters from the Qur'ān that were not like that read by the people. And Abū 'Abdillāh said: "Cease this reading. Read it as the people read it, until our *qā'im* arises. Once he has arisen, then he will read the Book of Allāh as it was, and he will bring out the scroll which 'Alī had written, and which he had brought out to the people once he had finished with it. He said to them: 'This is the book of Allāh, as Allāh revealed to Muḥammad. I have written it from two tablets'. They said: "We have a complete version of the Qur'ān, and so we don't need anything from yours". He replied: 'Very well. I swear by Allāh that you will never, ever see it again after this day of yours. Indeed, all that was incumbent upon me was to inform you of it when I finished it, that you may have been able to read it [had you chosen].'"<sup>546</sup>

A man asked a question to Abū Ja'far [al-Bāqir], to which he said:<sup>547</sup> No one can claim to have all of the Qur'ān, including its manifest aspect and hidden aspects, except the inheritors [the *'awsīyā*, the Imāms].<sup>548</sup>

Al-Bāqir said: I do not see anybody in this *ummah* who has all possession of all of the Qur'ān except the inheritors.<sup>549</sup>

Indeed, Allāh does not cease to raise up in the family of the Prophet one who knows His Book from its beginning to end.<sup>550</sup>

I swear by Allāh, that I know the book of Allāh from its beginning to end. It is as if all the knowledge of the heavens and the earth, the knowledge of all that will be and all that is, was laid in the palm of my hand. In it is the knowledge of everything.<sup>551</sup>

Aṣ-Ṣādiq said: I was born from the Prophet of Allāh, and I know the book of Allāh. It recounts the beginning of creation, and all that exists until the Day of Judgment. In it is all the knowledge of the heavens and the earth, the knowledge of the Paradise and the knowledge of Hell, and knowledge of all that was and all that is. I know all of this, as if I could see it in the palm of my hand. Indeed, Allāh has explained everything in this book.<sup>552</sup>

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<sup>544</sup> *Baṣā'ir* 4:193.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid.

<sup>547</sup> The question is not mentioned.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid 4:194.

<sup>549</sup> Ibid.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid.

<sup>552</sup> *al-Kāfi* 1:61.

Aṣ-Ṣādiq said: I was born from the Prophet of Allāh, and I know the book of Allāh. In it is the explanation of everything: the beginning of creation, the affair (*amr*) of the heavens and earth, of all the old generations and later generations, of all that was and all that will be, as if I am gazing upon all of this, as if it was right before my eyes.<sup>553</sup>

*al-Kāfī* also contains a similar chapter, entitled “No one possesses the entirety of the Qur’ān except the Imāms, and that they know all the knowledge of the Qur’ān”. It contains mostly the same narrations as the ones cited above from *Baṣā’ir*.<sup>554</sup> However, there are even more explicit statements where the Imāms even comment upon how the verses are actually supposed to be read, offering a variant reading of their own. Most of these narrations appear in the third section of *al-Kāfī*, the *Rawḍa*. The *Rawḍa* is not systematically organized like the rest of the text, and so these narrations are generally “buried” among narrations concerning other topics. It is impossible to determine whether this was intentional or not on the part of al-Kulaynī, though the process of “dispersing” certain types of narrations seems to be fairly common in the Shī‘ah *ḥadīth* literature. Amir-Moezzi cites a number of these narrations, which we should reproduce (with the English translation given to his original French work) here. Following his style, the “additions” or glosses (it is unclear whether or not these are referring to distortions in the ‘Uthmānic text, or whether or not they are merely a type of *tafsīr*, or an offering of variant readings) are presented in italics:

From Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq, on verse 2:211: “Ask the Sons of Israel how many irrefutable proofs we have given them, *some of them had faith in them, some denied them, some recognized them, and others deformed them*, but for him who deforms the gift of God after receiving it, God prepares a terrible punishment”.

From Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq, on verse 3:103: “You were on the edge of an abyss of fire, and He saved you *through Muḥammad*”.

From Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq, on verse 4:65-66: “Then they will not find in themselves the possibility of escaping what you have decided *about the cause of the Divine Friend [wāḥid, the Imām]* and they will submit *to God* totally/If we had told them: “Have yourselves put to death and *submit totally to the Imām*”, or else “leave your houses *for him*”, they would not have done so, except for a small number of them. If *those who oppose* followed the exhortations they received, it would truly have been better for them and more conducive to greater strength”.

From Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq, on verse 20:115: “In the past we confided to Adam *words about Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan, al-*

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<sup>553</sup> Ibid: 2:223.

<sup>554</sup> *al-Kāfī* 1:228-229.

*Husayn, and the Imāms of their descendents, but he forgot”.*<sup>555</sup>

From Imām ‘Alī, on verse 22:52: “Before you, We sent neither a lawgiving prophet nor a non-lawgiving prophet, *nor one inspired by angels*, without Satan intervening in his desires”.

From Imām as-Ṣādiq, on verse 33:71: “Whoever obeys God and His Prophet *regarding the holy power of ‘Alī*<sup>556</sup> *and the Imāms after him* will enjoy great happiness”.

From Imām Ar-Riḍā, on verse 42:13: “He has established for you, *o Family of Muḥammad*, that which he prescribed to Noah in religion, and what We reveal to you, *o Muḥammad*, and what We had prescribed to Abraham, to Moses and to Jesus: ‘Establish the religion *of the family of Muḥammad*, do not divide yourselves in it, and be united; how hard for the associationists, *those who associate other powers the holy power of ‘Alī*, does that to which you are calling them *through the holy power of ‘Alī* seem. Certainly God *guides* towards this religion, *O Muḥammad*, him who repents, *him who accepts your call toward the holy power of ‘Alī*’. [instead of: God chooses and calls to this religion whomever He chooses; He guides toward it him who repents].

From Imām ‘Alī, on verse 70:1-3: “A questioner clamored for ineluctable punishment/For those who do not believe *in the holy power of ‘Alī*, and no one can reject this punishment/That comes from God, the Master of Degrees”.<sup>557</sup>

These types of narrations are the ones most famously associated with the Shī‘ah. They seem to argue that the specific *name* of ‘Alī (and sometimes the Prophet himself) has been excluded from the Qur’ān. They may be classed as a type of alternate recitation, or (as stated above), they may merely be a type of *tafsīr* where the Imām inserts his comment as to what is referred to in the midst of the text (such a style is not uncommon in commentray literature). Regardless of how we interpret it, the key thing is that the Qur’ān *does* contain some kind of “esoteric” (*bāṭinī*) nature, something that is in the purview of the Imām and the Imām alone. This esotericism was never seriously taken up by Twelver Scholars, least of all the Qummī scholars we have been exploring here. The esoteric interpretation of the Qur’ān has been primarily the purview of the Ismā‘īlī sects. The *existence* of such an interior aspect to the Qur’ān, and that this makes up part of the Imām’s occult knowledge (and perhaps power), is referred to in these texts, but there is none of the elaborate *ta’wīl*/speculations that one finds in the works of Ismā‘īlī writers like Ḥamīd ad-Dīn al-Kirmānī or Ja‘far ibn Manṣūr, or even al-Qāḍī an-Nu‘mān. Nonetheless, if these *ḥadīths* are not taken as reporting actual *taḥrīf* in the

<sup>555</sup> This seems to be an implicit reference to the narration, discussed previously, about Adam’s “jealousy” towards the Prophet and his family and his subsequent fall from grace.

<sup>556</sup> “Holy power” is Amir-Moezzi’s translation for *walāyah*.

<sup>557</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 80-81.

Qur'an (as Amir-Moezzi asserts), then they do constitute a primitive form of *ta'wil* where the "real" meaning is seen to refer to the Imāms.

Again, it is also not clear whether or not these narrations are specifically asserting *tahrīf* or not. There is, as we will discuss, a genre of *ḥadīths* where a verse is recited and the Imam replies "No, this is how the verse was revealed," and offers a different version of the verse that usually contains some specific reference to the family of the Prophet. Other times, however, the new words are simply asserted, making it possible that the Imam is simply offering a commentary on the verse without actually indicating that the verse has been tampered with. Given the absence of clause markers in the Arabic language, such as commas, parentheses, and semicolons, it is impossible (as Amir-Moezzi does) to say that *all* of these narrations specifically refer to *tahrīf*.

It would be a mistake to assume that all Shī'ah narrations about the Imām in the Qur'an are "sectarian" in this way; many other narrations make such glosses that do not have any relationship to the question of the Prophet's succession. Some of these narrations are:

From Imām al-Bāqir, on verse 2:102: "And they approved, *by fidelity to the demons*, what the demons told them about the kingdom of Solomon".

From Imām 'Alī, on verse 2:205: "As soon as he turns his back, he attempts to corrupt what he finds upon the earth, he destroys the harvest and the livestock *by his injustice and wickedness*, God does not like corruption".

From the seventh Imām, al-Kāzhim, on verse 2:255: "All that is in the heavens and upon the earth belongs to Him, *and all that is between the heavens and the earth, or under the earth, the Invisible World and visible world; He is gracious and merciful; who can intercede with Him without his permission?*"

From Imām 'Alī, on verse 4:63: "God knows what is in their hearts, keep away from them *for the Word of Wretchedness is destined to them, as is torment*; address them in convincing words, that apply to their situation".

From Imām Ar-Riḍā, on verse 9:40: "God and His Sakinah descend upon *His Prophet* and sustained him with invisible armies".

From Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq, on verse 9:128: "A Prophet, taken from among *us* [instead of: you] has come to *us* [instead of: you]; the evil that weighs upon *us* [instead of: you]; the evil that weighs upon *us* [instead of: you] is heavy upon him; he ardently desires *our* [instead of: your] welfare; he is good and merciful towards believers.

One of the most important beliefs that we find in the Qummī *ḥadīth* literature is the doctrine that the Qur'ānic text, as famously compiled by the third caliph 'Uthmān, was corrupted and tampered with by the Prophet's companions, and that the true Qur'ān is in the possession of the Imām of the time. As we have said, many narrations are unclear on this point, but many other narrations are. This was not merely an issue of the existence of different types of *recitations*, something that Sunnīs accept (but, interestingly enough, most modern Twelver Shī'ite scholars do not). Rather, there is the specific accusation that the companions of the Prophet removed large sections of the Qur'ān, mainly references to the Imāms and the family of the Prophet. While many scholars have attempted to interpret this body of narrations as referring only to a difference in recitation, the *ḥadīths* under discussion here are quite explicit in their accusation against the 'Uthmānic codex.

The presence of a separate codex for 'Ali during the time of 'Uthmān is well-attested in Sunnī sources. When these are added to the Sunnī narrations where 'Ali is seen to have given his unqualified approval to the 'Uthmānic Codex,<sup>558</sup> it becomes clear that "'Ali's Qur'ān" was a great source of dispute amongst early Muslims. Unsurprisingly, the idea of a separate, "integral Qur'ān" (free from the Companion's corruptions) became an integral part of early Imāmī Shī'ī theology, though accusations of *tahrīf* seem also to be absent from the pre-Bāqir period. It is also worth noting that the integrity of the Qur'an appears to have been of little interest to the Ḥanafid movement, and so cannot be specifically associated with the *ghulāh*. It is more a question of the *emphasis* that Qummī scholars lay on Imāmāh, and on the names of the Imāms in the Qur'an in particular, whether a question of extremist or Ḥanafid influence. Many Ismā'īlī and *later ghulāh* openly accepted the idea that the Qur'ān had been changed and it is highly probable that it was narrations like the ones we will study that inspired their belief system. It should be remembered that these narrations are present within the Imāmī *ḥadīth* literature and, indeed, form quite a large part of it. Amir-Moezzi devotes a good deal of his research in the *Divine Guide* to this issue of *tahrīf*,<sup>559</sup> and refers to dozens of *ḥadīths* where the Imāms explicitly or implicitly argue that the Qur'ān was compiled during the time of 'Uthmān is a forgery, and that only the *ahl al-bayt* hold the keys to the true Revelation of God.

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<sup>558</sup> Jeffrey 249.

<sup>559</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 80-91.



‘Uthmān, along with his two predecessors, are seen as the epitome of evil, the “Imāms of disbelief” who follow in the footsteps of Pharoah.<sup>560</sup>

Goldziher argued that the Shī‘ahs do believe in a different Qur’ān, though this was mainly tied up with St. Clair Tisdall’s publication of the two “missing” *surahs* of the Qur’ān, supposedly found in India. Tisdall’s discussion will be referred to below. Eliash has challenged this thesis and argued that the Shī‘ites only differ from the Sunnīs about order and pronunciation, without significant difference in content.<sup>561</sup> In these studies, there seems to be two main methodological problems: one is to ignore the large number of narrations where specific corrections of the content of the ‘Uthmānic Codex are made, relying instead upon general narrations about *tahrīf* that, when taken out of context, can be interpreted in a way that does not indicate upon *tahrīf*. The second, larger methodological problem is that much of this research appears to be trying to answer the question: “Do the Shī‘ites believe in a different Qur’ān?” This question blurs the distinction between early and late Shī‘ism. If the question is whether or not modern Imāmī Shī‘ahs accept the ‘Uthmānic Codex then the answer is, generally, yes; but the fact that most modern Shī‘ites are emphatic about their belief in the ‘Uthmānic Codex is not relevant to determining the beliefs of early Shī‘ite scholars like al-Kulaynī on this issue. In this section, we will seek to explore what is presented on this subject within the early Shī‘ite Imāmī *ḥadīth* literature. Because of the controversial nature of any discussion on *tahrīf*, it must be emphasized that we are only seeking to present what is stated within books such as *al-Kāfī*, *Baṣā’ir*, and other early texts such as the *tafsīr* of al-Qummī. We will not enter into any discussion about whether or not the ‘Uthmānic codex is actually authentic or not, or to whether or not the Imāms actually taught *tahrīf*. The school of thought followed by al-Kulaynī, aṣ-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, and others, is clearly one interpretation amongst many that existed at the time.

Concerning the subject of *tahrīf* itself, one of the most important texts in this regard is the discussion of al-Qummī in his *Tafsīr*. Al-Qummī deals with the issue of *tahrīf* explicitly in his introduction. The language of this discussion is very interesting. It occurs within a technical discussion of the various categories of verses that would be familiar to anybody with a background in Qur’ānic studies: abrogating (*nāsikh*) verses vs. abrogated (*mansūkh*), decisive (*muḥkam*) vs. ambiguous (*mutashābih*), and so forth. But alongside of this, he mentions places where “letters have

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<sup>560</sup> Amir-Moezzi “Aspects de l’Imāmologie IV” 198-199.

<sup>561</sup> Eliash “The Shī‘ī Qur’ān” 24.

been replaced by other letters” and, shockingly enough, “verses which contradict what God has revealed”.<sup>562</sup> He gives a number of examples of verses that “contradict what Allāh has revealed”: the language is very casual, and he does not seem intent upon proving that the Qur’ān was corrupted. Rather, such distortions are taken as an obvious truth by him, one that does not need substantial deductive proof. It is also worth noting that there does not seem to be any attempt, in these early books, to refute Shī‘ah who believe in the integrity of the Qur’ān. In the bibliographical literature, there also does not seem to be any early works attributed to Shī‘ah scholars in refutation of the *tahrīf* belief, though a number of early scholars are attributed with books that seem to be in favour of such a position.<sup>563</sup> An example of al-Qummi’s work on *tahrīf* includes the *ḥadīth*.

Concerning the verse “You are the best nation [*ummah*] which has been raised to the people, commanding what is good, and forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allāh”,<sup>564</sup> Abū ‘Abdillāh [aṣ-Ṣādiq] said: “The best nation? These were the people who killed the Prince of Believers, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn”. And so it was said to him: “Then how was it revealed, O son of the Prophet?” To which he said: “Indeed, you are the best Imāms [*aimmah*] which has been raised to the people.’ Do you not see the praise which Allāh gives in the last part of the verse, where He says: ‘commanding what is good, and forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allāh’.”<sup>565</sup>

He also lists several verses in which things have been simply removed. The sections in italics are those that do not appear in the contemporary Qur’ān; chains, or even the names of the Imāms making the statements, are not mentioned by al-Qummi. This perhaps indicates how little proof al-Qummi needed to establish his arguments, since it appears that the doctrine was almost universally accepted by the early Imāmī Shī‘i:

Verse 4:156 “However, Allāh bears witness to what He has revealed to you *concerning ‘Alī*. He brings it down with His Knowledge, to which the angels bear witness”.<sup>566</sup>

Verse 4: 168: “Indeed, those who disbelieve and oppress *the family of the Prophet, denying them their rights*, then Allāh will never forgive them”.<sup>567</sup>

<sup>562</sup> al-Qummi 5; cf. Kohlberg “Imāmīte Attitude” 211.

<sup>563</sup> Kohlberg “Imāmīte Attitude” 213.

<sup>564</sup> 3:110

<sup>565</sup> al-Qummi 10.

<sup>566</sup> Ibid.

<sup>567</sup> Ibid.

Verse 5:67: "O Prophet! Deliver what has been revealed to you from your Lord *concerning 'Alī*, if you do not do this, then you will not have passed on your message".<sup>568</sup>

Verse 6:93 "If only those who have *oppressed the family of the Prophet, denying them their rights*, could see the deluge of death".<sup>569</sup>

Verse 26:227 "Those who have who disbelieved and oppress *the family of the Prophet, denying them their rights*, if only they knew by what overturning they would be overturned".<sup>570</sup>

Such narrations can be found in many other collections of *tafsīr* related *ḥadīth*. Another important early and highly authoritative work is that of al-'Ayyāshī (d. 320/932). It is replete with explicit references to *tahrīf*. Al-'Ayyāshī narrates that Imām al-Bāqir said:

If it had not been for additions and subtractions made in the Book of Allāh, then our rights would not have remained hidden to men of intelligence. If our Resurrector had already come, then the Qur'ān would confirm that which he says.<sup>571</sup>

Other altered verses are described in this *tafsīr*. Many of these statements are quite explicit, insofar as one of the Imāms says "The verse was revealed like this" (*nuzilat al-āyah ḥakadhā*), and then a verse different from that in the standard Qur'ān is described; such narrations can only be seen as explicit accusations of *tahrīf*, in contrast to some of the earlier narrations we have discussed, which may very well just be corrections or glosses to the Qur'ānic text. Some of these altered verses where the phrase "the verse was revealed like this" include:

From Imām al-Bāqir, on verse 2:90: Terrible is what they have purchased for themselves, that they would jealously disbelieve in what Allāh has sent down *about 'Alī*.<sup>572</sup>

From Imām al-Bāqir, on verse 4:47: O you who have been given the book from before, believe in what has been sent down *about 'Alī*, verifying that which is with you.<sup>573</sup>

From Imām al-Bāqir, on verse 7:112: And they bore witness upon themselves [to Allāh's question] 'Am I not your Lord *and is*

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<sup>568</sup> Ibid.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid.

<sup>571</sup> al-'Ayyāshī 1:13.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid. 1:50.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid. 1:245.

From Imām al-Bāqir, on verse 16:24: When it is said to them: "What has your Lord sent down about 'Alī?" they would say: "Nothing but ancient fables".<sup>575</sup>

The phraseology "the verse was revealed like this" and so forth is very important in terms of the distinction that some later Shī'ah scholars, such as al-Mufīd, would attempt to make, and the way that Shī'ah orthodoxy has tried to explain away these verses. This is to say that these verses that speak of change refer to the removal of the *tafsīr* or *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān, but not the Qur'ān itself.<sup>576</sup> However, the fact that these narrations are saying "No, the verse was revealed *like this*" indicates that this interpretation cannot be applied to all the narrations under discussion. Other narrations indicate, however, that the text is intact and that all that has been distorted is its interpretation and meaning. This shows that there was some confusion amongst the Qummī scholars on this issue, though the general consensus seems to be that at least some *tahrīf* has occurred. In another well-known text, namely the *Tafsīr* attributed directly to the Eleventh Imām Ḥasan al-'Askarī, it is reported from Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq that

After the Prophet was elevated to Allāh's reward [i.e., after his death], many of the people of purely external faith apostated. They distorted many of its inner interpretations, distorted its meanings, and changed these meanings to something other than they were.<sup>577</sup>

Narrations about *tahrīf* form a major part of the Shī'ah corpus until the time of An-Nu'mānī, the student of al-Kulaynī. After this we notice a marked decrease in both *tahrīf* and *ta'wīl* related narrations. In his *Ghaybah*, we read about *tahrīf* in *sūrat al-masad*,<sup>578</sup> where 'Alī is reported to have said about the coming of the Twelfth Imām:

It is as if I see the Persians [*'ajam*, non-Arabs] in the mosque of Kūfah, teaching the people the Qur'ān as it was revealed". The Imām was asked: "O Prince of the believers, the Qur'ān is not as it is revealed?" To which he said: "There has been removed from the Qur'ān seventy names of the people of Quraysh, as well as the names of their fathers. Abū Lahab's name [mentioned

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<sup>574</sup> Ibid 2:41

<sup>575</sup> Ibid. 1:51.

<sup>576</sup> Cf. Kohlberg "Imāmīte Attitude" 215-216.

<sup>577</sup> *Tafsīr al-'Askarī* 63.

<sup>578</sup> 111:1-4

in *masd*] was retained only to be used as a weapon against the Prophet".<sup>579</sup>

A similar narration also appears in *al-Kāfī*. It is cited by Amir-Moezzi and we will rely upon his translation:

Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Naṣr recounts: "[Imām] Abū 'l-Ḥasan [Ar-Riḍā] lent me a Volume of the Qur'ān, but asked me not to look inside. However, I opened the book and came upon the verse, "those who became impious..." and I saw in what followed of the verse the names of 70 men from the Quraysh tribe and the names of their fathers. The Imām then sent someone to tell me to return the Volume".<sup>580</sup>

The presence of these narrations in An-Nu'mānī's *al-Ghaybah* is instructive. An-Nu'mānī preceded Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq by a few decades. According to his own account, he decided to create a compilation of *ḥadīths* concerning the Twelfth Imām's Occultation, because the Shī'ahs were in a great state of confusion about the issue, and were in a state of doubt about the Imām of their time.<sup>581</sup> Arjomand argues that the entire idea of Imāmah seemed to be open to confusion and doubt in An-Nu'mānī's time, and that the purpose of An-Nu'mānī's book was to establish an orthodoxy with regards to the Imām's existence;<sup>582</sup> clearly, then, An-Nu'mānī had a greater agenda for himself than merely narrating every *ḥadīth* he heard, and would probably have avoided narrations that he considered to be of dubious and inauthentic origin, narrations that would only create more confusion in the minds of the Shī'ah.

Other narrations can be found in the *rijāl* literature. There we find the contributions of individuals like Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Ju'fī, who were instrumental in spreading the mystical Imāmological teachings of Shi'ism amongst the 'Alid legitimists. In the *Ikhtisās* of Shaykh al-Mufīd, we read from Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Ju'fī a specific narration concerning *tahrīf*

Jābir narrates: I was with Abū Ja'far one night, and I read to him the verse: "O you who believe! If the call is made to the Friday prayer, then hasten to the remembrance of Allāh". The Imām said: "O Jābir, how did you read it again?" And so Jābir repeated his reading. The Imām said: "This is *tahrīf*!" And so Jābir said: "Then how should it be read?" The Imām said: "O you who believe! If the call is made to the Friday prayer, then depart [*madu*] to the remembrance of Allāh". This is how it was sent

<sup>579</sup> An-Nu'mānī 318.

<sup>580</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 84.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid. 20-23.

<sup>582</sup> Kohlberg "From Imāmīyyah" 524.

down.<sup>583</sup>

These narrations form a much stronger basis for the idea that many of the early Imāmī Shī'ī rejected more of the 'Uthmān's Codex than the two "additional" *suras* presented by St. Clair Tisdall in 1913, the *sura* of *walāyah* and the *sura* of the Two Lights.<sup>584</sup> The question of *tahrīf* in the Qur'ān is also dealt with by Jafri, and he passes over the large number of narrations that deal with this subject in absolute silence.<sup>585</sup> As time developed, the Twelver Shī'ah '*ulamā'*' reached a greater and greater consensus that the Qur'ān as accepted by the Sunnī majority is, in fact, the true Qur'ān, and that no *tahrīf* has occurred in it.<sup>586</sup> The large number of narrations that speak about *tahrīf* are, once again, implicitly attributed to the forgeries of *ghulāb* and other "deviant" groups that were marginalized by the orthodoxy that developed during the Buyid period. But it should also be observed that, just because the contemporary consensus is against the belief in Qur'ānic *tahrīf*, does not mean that this was the belief held by the early Imāmī Shī'ites. Unfortunately, Jafri's work does not make any mention of these narrations; but he contents himself with quoting the position of Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq on the matter:

Our belief concerning the Qur'ān is that it is the Word of God, His revelation sent down by Him. His speech and His Book... 'Falsehood cannot come at it from before it or behind it. It is a revelation from the Wise, the Praiseworthy.' And our belief is that God, the Blessed and Exalted, is its Creator and Revealer and Master and Protector and Utterer. Our belief is that the Qur'ān, which God revealed to His Prophet Muḥammad, is the same as the one between the boards [the two covers, *daffatayn*]. And it is that which is in the hands of the people, and is not greater in extent than that. The number of *Suras* as generally accepted is one hundred and fourteen.<sup>587</sup>

At the very least, it would seem that the way Jafri presents the issue is somewhat disingenuous. A sound academic study of early Shī'ism should not selectively ignore certain evidences in favour of others, especially when those evidences are extensive. It should also be noted

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<sup>583</sup> al-Mufid *Ikhtisās* 129.

<sup>584</sup> This is especially true since Tisdall himself argues that the two *suras* under question are forgeries. See St. Clair Tisdall 231-243. As Amir-Moezzi notes, there is not any evidence to support the idea that these two *suras* (as presented by Tisdall and others, at least) were ever considered by the Shī'ahs to be part of the true, 'Alid Qur'ān, except for a narration of al-Māzandarānī (author of *al-Manāqib*) where it is stated that the Prophet's companions removed the entirety of the *surat al-walāyah*. Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 90.

<sup>585</sup> Jafri 311-312.

<sup>586</sup> Momen 81.

<sup>587</sup> Qtd. in Jafri 311-312.

that Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq's statement does not actually accord with common Shī'ah orthodoxy. According to the Shī'ī juristic tradition, the number of *suras* is actually 112, not 114, since the *suras* 93 and 94 are considered to be one *surah* as opposed to two, and the "famous" ruling is that *suras* 105 and 106 are as well.<sup>588</sup>

As we have seen, there are a large number of narrations that contradict Jafri's thesis that the topic of *tahrīf* is a rare subject in the Shī'ah literature. Eliash also makes a similar mistake. He seems to argue that it is impossible for the Shī'ahs to have believed in a different Qur'ān, since Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq said they did not.<sup>589</sup> He argues that the only substantive difference between the Sunnīs and Shī'ites on this issue are some minor points of dispute with regards to recitation and order.<sup>590</sup> Amir-Moezzi, however, presents a very convincing case that the Imāms strongly condemned much of the 'Uthmānic Codex and held it in derision, although it is not clear that all of the narrations he offers are in fact indicative of *tahrīf*. A further problem with Jafri's analysis is the implicit assumption that the statements of Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq automatically accord with that of the early Imāms. While Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq was perhaps the last of the great traditionists amongst the Baghdad '*ulamā*' (before his students Shaykh al-Mufīd and Ash-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā began laying the foundations for a rationalized vision of Imāmāh), there is no doubt that this process of rationalization was already in full-swing by aṣ-Ṣadūq's lifetime. Jafri also makes another mistake here. As Amir-Moezzi correctly points out, Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq seems to be the *first* of the Shī'ah '*ulamā*' to completely ignore the question of substantive *tahrīf* in the Qur'ānic text.<sup>591</sup> His own words stand in contrast to the large number of narrations that Amir-Moezzi and ourselves have pointed out in this regard, only some of which we have cited. Importantly enough, in his study (and others like it), no *ḥadīth* has been presented which says something like "Anybody who believes the Qur'ān has been tampered with" or "the Qur'ān of 'Alī is no different from that of 'Uthmān", or anything of this nature. Nor are there any chapter headings in the early Imāmī *ḥadīth* making similar statements. In fact, in the chapters with titles like

<sup>588</sup> Cf. Ash-Shahīd Ath-Thānī 1:108; some modern jurists seem to doubt this. Cf. As-Sīstānī *Masā'il* 122.

<sup>589</sup> Eliash "Shī'ī Qur'ān" 21-24.

<sup>590</sup> Even if this were the only point of dispute, it is very troubling for the "orthodox" view that the Qur'ān is the absolute revealed word of God. Muslim polemicists often attack Christians and Jews on the grounds that their books have been distorted and corrupted, while not a single word of the Qur'ān has been changed. If one acknowledges that there are various opinions and disputes about the ordering of the Qur'ān, then this is actually quite a significant change in a work that is supposed to be the Eternal Word of God.

<sup>591</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 89-90.

“the Bounties of the Qur’ān” and so forth, where one might expect such statements, most of the narrations speak about the “true Qur’ān” of ‘Alī and speak explicitly about *tahrīf*. The chapter with this title in *al-Kāfī* is instructive in this regard. This includes the narration of Ibn Salamah, quoted above, where the Qur’ān of ‘Alī is described in no uncertain terms. We also read in that section that:

Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq said: The Qur’ān that the Angel Gabriel brought to Muḥammad contained 17,000 verses.<sup>592</sup>

Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq said I swear by Allāh, the command and the caliphate can never go to the family of Abū Bakr or ‘Umar, nor to the Umayyads [the family of ‘Uthmān] nor to the progeny of Ṭalḥā and Zubayr. This is because they have renounced the Qur’ān, destroyed the traditions, and annihilated the laws.<sup>593</sup>

It is known that variant readings, orders, and so forth are extremely commonplace and accepted in Sunnism;<sup>594</sup> the famous As-Suyūṭī discusses these at length in his *al-Ittiqān*. It is safe to say that the Muslim belief in the absolute, 100% integrity of the present Qur’ānic text (down to each and every letter) is a popularized “lay” belief (heavily influenced by politicized Islamism) that is not shared by most traditional Muslim scholars (even if they may not make the facts known in this case).<sup>595</sup> The fact that there were many different recensions of the Qur’ān should come as a surprise only to the most uneducated in the history of the Qur’ān, and so it should also not be surprising to discover that the Shī‘ahs believed in a recension quite different from that of the Sunnīs. But it should be noted that the text described in these narrations seems to be far more than a different series of pronunciations and vowelling<sup>596</sup> (though the presence of such recensions is sufficient to dismiss the popular Muslim belief that not even a single letter has been removed or change from the Qur’ān). This “integral Qur’ān” is described as a text which contains “everything”, three times the length of the present Qur’ān.

<sup>592</sup> *al-Kāfī* 2:634. The standard numbering of the Qur’ān places the number closer to 6,000. Here, one should recall the narrations concerning the Book of Fāṭimahh, where the Imāms state that the Book of Fāṭimahh is three times as long as “your Qur’ān”.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid. 2:600.

<sup>594</sup> Jeffrey 249.

<sup>595</sup> The order of the *suras* and their apparent lack of any connection has led many, even amongst the more “orthodox” Muslims, to question whether or not the order of the Qur’ān was faithful to the original revelation. Cf. Peters 297.

<sup>596</sup> As some have attempted to understand the “Shī‘ī Qur’ān”, especially the variant readings attributed to the brother of the fifth Imām, Zaid ibn ‘Alī. Cf. Jeffrey 250.



The large number *tahrīf*-related narrations in authoritative Sunnī works<sup>597</sup> makes it more probable that the Qur'ān was, in actuality, not compiled in full accordance with the Prophet's revelation; but a full discussion of that subject would be outside the scope of this research. For our purposes here, we can say that the presence of such narrations would indicate that the belief in *tahrīf* was wide spread during the early centuries of Islam, and was not something unique to the so-called *ghulāh*, or even to the Shī'ah. We have seen that some Shī'ah scholars have tried to dismiss the *tahrīf* literature as rare but this seems far less tenable when, in addition to the fact that these narrations are not at all rare in the Shī'ah literature, that similar narrations can also be found in the Sunnī literature. Since the Shī'ah Imāms were themselves opposed to 'Uthmān, who is credited with having compiled the "Codex" that exists today, and given the fact that there are so many narrations from them concerning *tahrīf*, it seems unlikely that Sunnī scholars who upheld the caliphate of 'Uthmān would have had doubts about the integrity of his Qur'ān, but 'Uthmān's greatest enemies would not.

One should also place these narrations in a larger historical context. The belief in *tahrīf* is, as we have seen, linked to the coming of the Twelfth Imām. It is he who will bring back the true Qur'ān and destroy the distortions that have been entered into it, implying a kind of esotericism in the tradition of Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Ju'fī. In the formative period of Shī'ism the whole idea of the *ghaybah* was linked with a chiliastic spirit of rebellion against the powers that be;<sup>598</sup> and the 'Uthmānic Qur'ān was an integral part of the powers that be. This was, after all, the Codex promulgated by the 'Uthmān and his family, the Umayyads, who were the arch-enemies of the Shī'ahs. Even though what became the Twelver Imāmī line of Shī'ism was relatively quietistic, the millenarian belief in the coming of the Twelfth Imām was linked to a spirit of rebellion against both the temporal ruling powers and the Qur'ān they had (in the minds of the Shī'ah at least) imposed upon the people. Occultation was intimately linked to this idea. Arjomand argues that the first group that expressed an interest in the idea of a Hidden Imām was the Kaysāniyah, who along with Abū al-Khaṭṭāb are often regarded as "arch-*ghulāh*", and the entire belief in the *parasoia* of the Imām was linked to a spirit of armed rebellion.<sup>599</sup>

<sup>597</sup> Cf. Al-Bukhārī 8:169. Muslim 4:167.

<sup>598</sup> Certainly as evidenced by the number of Shī'ī rebellions in the early period. Cf. Hawting "First Dynasty" 50-53, 99-100.

<sup>599</sup> Arjomand "Crisis" 493.

The language of the *ḥadīths* discussing the Manuscript of Fāṭimah, cited previously, are also telling in this regard. The Imām continually refers to “your Qur’ān” in opposition to the book of Fāṭimah, and states emphatically that there is not even a single word from “your Qur’ān” in the book of Fāṭimah. The language seems almost abusive towards the present Qur’ānic text; it appears to be almost without any worth, and is viewed as a profane text. In any case, the addition of the possessive pronoun “your” would seem to indicate that there is more than one book referred to as the Qur’ ān.

In spite of the large body of narrations that explicitly mention *tahrīf*, there is also a tendency within the early Imāmī literature to “make do” with the ‘Uthmānic text until the coming of the Mahdī. This is one of the interesting tensions within the Qummī literature, and reflects the struggle for compromise that was being waged by people like al-Kulaynī. These narrations are explicit on the legitimacy of the Qur’an, and some of them include:

Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq said: The Prophet said: Whatever conforms to the Book of Allāh, then take it; and whatever contradicts it, then reject it.<sup>600</sup>

Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq said: If a *ḥadīth* comes to you, then compare it to the Book of Allāh and take the Book of Allāh as a witness.<sup>601</sup>

Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq said: Any *ḥadīth* that that does not conform to the Qur’ān, then it should be rejected.<sup>602</sup>

Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq said that the Prophet addressed the people, saying: “O people, whatever you hear reported from me, if it conforms to the Qur’ān then it is something I have said, and if it contradicts the Qur’ān then it is something I have not said”.<sup>603</sup>

As we have seen, the position that the Qur’ān should be used as some kind source for religion did not *eo ipso* exclude the position that it has been tampered with. As we have seen, in some narrations the believers are ordered to use the ‘Uthmānic Qur’ān (in prayers and other matters) and await until the coming of the Twelfth Imām to use openly the true Qur’ān. Here, we should recall the narration of Ibn Salāmāh, cited above:

Ibn Salamāh reports: A man was reading the Qur’ān to Abū ‘Abdillāh [aṣ-Ṣādiq], and I heard letters from the Qur’ān that were not like that read by the people. And Abū ‘Abdillāh said: “Cease this reading. Read it as the people read it, until our *Qā’im*

<sup>600</sup> *al-Kāfī* 1:69.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid.

arises. Once he has arisen, then he will read the Book of Allāh as it was, and he will bring out the scroll which ‘Alī had written, and which he had brought out to the people once he had finished with it.<sup>604</sup>

This narration also appears in *al-Kāfī*.<sup>605</sup> Amir-Moezzi argues another narration in the same section of *al-Kāfī* “Read the Qur’ān as you have learned it”<sup>606</sup> is also of a similar import, though this is probably a matter of interpretation.<sup>607</sup> Such narrations provide an easy way of reconciling those narrations where the believers are ordered to make reference to the Qur’ān. Such an injunction seems to be a temporary measure, a kind of *taqiyyah* before the coming of the Twelfth Imām.

### Progression of *Tahrīf* Narrations in the Early Imāmī Shī‘ī *Hadīth* Literature

It would seem that there is a parabolic progression in terms of the *ḥadīths* concerning the subject of *tahrīf*. It apparently reached its peak in the *Rawḍā* of *Al-Kāfī* and then in the two *tafsīrs* of Al-‘Ayyashi and al-Qummī. All three of these men died in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century *hijrī*. It seems that it was during this period that speculation about *tahrīf* reached its heights, for it is only in these works that we find the expression “No, this is how the verse was revealed” used frequently. There is also a greater emphasis on *ta’wīl* and commentary on the narrations in terms of Imāmology in these texts. After Al-Kulayni, and entering into the time of Shaykh as-Saduq, we notice a marked decrease in *tahrīf* related narrations.

The way in which Al-Qummī himself discusses these narrations and the total absence of any books listed in the *rijāl* literature written in defence of the ‘Uthmānic text would seem to indicate that the belief in *tahrīf* was extremely widespread. Aṣ-Ṣadūq, as we have discussed, appears to be the first Imāmī scholar to proclaim openly that there was no *tahrīf* in the Qur’ān. There are many, like Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam, who are *silent* on the subject, but there does not seem to be any trace of those who were actively *opposed* to the idea and wrote against it. Nonetheless, they must have existed, because we see that the *muqassirah* were known for their belief that the task of the Imām was to preserve the Qur’ān, and the fact that they never wrote that there was another Qur’ān which the Imām was

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<sup>604</sup> *Basā’ir* 4:193.

<sup>605</sup> *al-Kāfī* 2:633.

<sup>606</sup> *Ibid.* 2:631.

<sup>607</sup> Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide* 89.

protecting would indicate that they accepted the ‘Uthmānic Codex as authentic, integral, and reliable. If not, the edifice of their basic belief in Imāmah would collapse.

The subject of *ta’wīl*, however, is different. *Ta’wīl* has always had associations with “esotericists” (*bāṭiniyyah*), and we have seen from our study of the Imāmī *rijāl* literature that those narrating *bāṭinī* narrations were exiled and even subjected to physical violence. There can be little doubt that narrations that claim a “hidden” meaning to the Qur’ān are *bāṭinī* in nature, and so in the sometimes violent climate of 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century Qumm, we see that there are no such *ta’wīl* type works attributed to those who are usually considered part of the *muqassirah* faction. We do not see such narrations attributed to people like Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam either. Ironically enough, while *tahrīf* seems to have been an uncontroversial subject, *ta’wīl* (in the sense that esotericists use it) seems to have been *extremely* controversial, with one faction of the Imāmī community embracing it in a way similar to primitive Ismā‘īlism, and another faction silent on it in their own books and penalizing those who reported such narrations from the Qumm community. This is something we can glean from the *rijāl* books, and can only be inferred from the constant complaints about *bāṭinī* narrations that came from the people of Qumm. However, we do not have any existant sources from the *muqassirah* where they specifically refute the idea. Individuals like Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam are simply silent about it, even though contemporaries of his (like Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, as we have seen from the antinomianism chapter) were certainly espousing such ideas during that time period. Their line of attack seems to be against a general tendency towards anything “esoteric”, and part of that would seem to be the *ta’wīl* that was so assiduously avoided in their works. Nonetheless, other than general *rijāl* based attacks on the esotericists, we do not find any specific attacks on the idea that the Qur’ān contains an esoteric meaning from any of the *muqassirah* or from individuals like Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam.

# Conclusion

## Repression of the *Ghulāh* after the Occultation

We have seen how many of the ideas common to the *ghulāh* were endorsed by scholars such as al-Kulaynī and al-Qummī. As was discussed in the introduction, the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries were a period where a number of doctrinal beliefs intermingled in the *ḥadīth* literature. Eventually, however, the fluidity and openness on issues of orthodoxy would lead to conflict and violence. The *ghulāh* faction was openly repressed in a series of battles that occurred in the wake of the Twelfth Imām's occultation in the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD, and this paved the way for the establishment of an official orthodoxy in the time of Shaykh aṣ-Ṣadūq and Shaykh al-Mufīd. In spite of the rather violent expulsion of the *ghulāh* from the community, we have seen how many quasi-*ghulāh* ideas of the superhuman nature of the Imāms remain in place.

With the sudden removal of direct spiritual authority (as manifested in the figure of the Imām), it is not surprising that a minority faction like the *muqāṣṣirah* would be able to initiate a theological revolution. This revolution seems to have begun almost immediately. As is known, Shī'ah orthodoxy believes that the Twelfth Imām has had two Occultations: a "short" Occultation and a "long" Occultation. In the former, he was represented by a series of four representatives, and it is only with the latter Occultation that the Imām becomes completely hidden and cut-off from his followers.

According to modern Shī'ah orthodoxy, the four representatives of the Twelfth Imām were: 'Uthmān al-Amīrī, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn 'Uthmān al-Amīrī, Abū al-Qāsim Ḥusayn ibn Rūḥ An-Nawbakhtī, and 'Alī ibn Muḥammad As-Samarī. As Momen demonstrates, the idea that these were the sole representatives of the Imām during this period seems to be a later introduction and re-reading of history.<sup>608</sup> There were enormous disputes about who would represent the Twelfth Imām, and this dispute would become the focal point of a battle for what constituted Shī'ah orthodoxy. The four representatives were challenged by a number of more esoteric and "extremist" Shī'ahs. Prominent amongst them is Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr An-Numayrī, from whom the Nuṣayrī sect trace their lineage. As with many such figures, there is great dispute as to what he actually believed. Momen

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<sup>608</sup> Momen 162-163.

writes he is said to have believed in the divinity of the tenth Imām, ‘Alī al-Hādī; or believing that Imām al-Hādī was the Imām and that Imām al-Hādī’s son Muḥammad was the promised Mahdī, or that he believed that Muḥammad the son of the eleventh Imām al-‘Askari was the Mahdī, and that he was the gate.<sup>609</sup> aṭ-Ṭūsī’s account of his dispute with the second representative, would seem to indicate much more strongly that Nuṣayr believed in the same Twelve Imāms as the other Shī‘ah, and his dispute with the official “representatives” of the Twelfth Imām would indicate this. In particular, he is said to have locked-horns with the second representative Abū Ja’far. There would seem little point in his disputing with the “representatives” of the Twelfth Imām if he did not claim to be a part of the community that believed in him. In any case, aṭ-Ṭūsī’s account is telling with regard to the level of hatred and abuse that the “moderate” Shī‘ah *fuqahā* directed towards those they considered extreme. He writes:

Ibn Rūḥ has told us, on the authority of Abū Naṣr Hibat Allāh ibn Muḥammad, that Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr An-Numayrī was among the companions of Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī [Imām al-‘Askari]. When Abū Muḥammad died, he is said to have claimed the position held by Abū Ja’far Muḥammad ibn ‘Uthmān, i.e., that he was the companion (*sahib*) of the Imām of the Time. He claimed to be his gate. And so Allāh made plain all of the atheism and ignorance of Nuṣayr, and he was cursed and denounced by Abū Ja’far Muḥammad ibn ‘Uthmān...Sa’d ibn ‘Abdallāh says: Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr An-Numayrī claimed that he was a prophet, and that he had been sent by ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad [Imām al-Hādī]. He believed in the transmigration of souls, and went to extremes with regards to Abū al-Ḥasan [Imām al-Hādī], claiming divinity for him. He made permissible all the things that were forbidden, and allowed men to sodomize each other.<sup>610</sup>

As is always the case with literature of this nature, it is nearly impossible to decipher what Ibn Nuṣayr’s actual beliefs were, the Nuṣayrī sect that has developed in his name is firm in the belief that the Imāms are the incarnation of God, as well as the belief that Ibn Nuṣayr was the gate to the eleventh and twelfth Imāms.<sup>611</sup> The accusation of sodomy is often used to attack *ghulāh* groups (and, in many cases, even “orthodox” Shī‘ah themselves), and the particular accusation of sodomy with regards to Ibn Nuṣayr seems to appear only in the heriesographical literature.

Nowhere is this battle between “moderates” and “extremists” better exemplified than in the crucifixion of the great Ṣufī martyr al-Ḥallāj in the year 309/922.<sup>612</sup> al-Ḥallāj, of course, came from a

<sup>609</sup> Ibid. 58.

<sup>610</sup> aṭ-Ṭūsī *al-Ghaybah* 397; An-Nawbakhtī 93.

<sup>611</sup> Moosa 259-261.

<sup>612</sup> Corbin *History* 199.

Sunnī background, and was educated in the Qur’ān and *ḥadīths* by Sunnī ‘*ulamā*’.<sup>613</sup> Yet we find him, thirty years into the so-called short Occultation of the Twelfth Imām challenging the leadership of the person whom orthodox Shī’ahs consider to be the third representative of the Twelfth Imām during this period: Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn ibn Rūḥ An-Nawbakhtī,<sup>614</sup> and his kinsmen, Abū Sahl An-Nawbakhtī, who Arjomand argues was one of the most instrumental figures in creating a more moderate Shī’ah orthodoxy.<sup>615</sup> The fact that a Ṣūfī from a Sunnī background could play such a role in the moderate-*ghulāḥ* battle is indicative of the non-Ḥusaynid origins of *ghulāḥ* speculation. Indeed, it is to the latter that Moussavi attributes the “triumph” of “moderate Shī’ism” over extremist deviations,<sup>616</sup> and he is also the author of one of the first Shī’ah heresiographical pieces where the *ghulāḥ* sects are attacked with great vigour. Yet even within this family, “extremist” ideas about the Imāms’ supernatural powers and perfections can be found,<sup>617</sup> and so it could be argued that the Nawbakhtīs “triumph” over the *ghulāḥ* was not total, and was based in large part on making compromises with the *ghulāḥ* factions.<sup>618</sup>

al-Ḥallāj’s battle eventually resulted in an official indictment as a *ghālī*.<sup>619</sup> He is said to have written a letter to Abū Sahl, where he specifically proclaimed: “I am the agent (*wakīl*) of the Lord of the Age (*ṣāhib Az-zamān*, the Twelfth Imām)”.<sup>620</sup> Even though Massignon portrays him as being a great hero of Sunnī mysticism,<sup>621</sup> this would ignore the fact that he claimed to be the representative of the Shī’ahs Twelfth Imām, and that this was part of the origin of his battle with the religious establishment of his day. It also ignores the remarkable parallels between the theology of al-Ḥallāj and that attributed to early Imāmī *ghulāḥ* sects. In the conflict between the two we can see the two great themes of Shī’ism colliding with each other in their most spectacular battle. On the one hand, we have Abū Sahl An-Nawbakhtī, who argued for the existence of the Imām on entirely legalistic bases related to *tashrī’* (law-giving). As al-Murtaḍā and others would argue later, God’s *sharī’ah* requires an explicator at all times. As such, He must appoint a *ḥujjat* who makes His Law known. Standing opposed to this tendency was al-Ḥallāj, and in him we see the great themes of early

<sup>613</sup> Massignon 29.

<sup>614</sup> Hussain 119-121.

<sup>615</sup> Arjomand “Crisis” 505-506.

<sup>616</sup> Moussavi 21, 55.

<sup>617</sup> Modarressi *Crisis* 44; Bayham-Daou 81-84.

<sup>618</sup> Newman *Formative* 19-23.

<sup>619</sup> Massignon 150-151.

<sup>620</sup> Arjomand “Crisis” 506.

<sup>621</sup> Cf. Moussavi 107-108.

“extremist” speculation re-capitulated, most particularly the idea that God becomes Manifest through a human form (in this case, that of al-Ḥallāj himself). This, of course, derives from his most famous of statements “*ʾAna al-Ḥaqq*”, (I am the Truth, I am God). This statement is the most famous example of “ecstatic utterances” for which many Sufis have become famous.<sup>622</sup> something uttered in a state of mystical union, where it is no longer the mystic who speaks, but God Himself.<sup>623</sup> al-Ḥallāj claimed to have both mystical powers (a belief which was treated with derision by later Shīʿah *fuqahāʾ*, such as al-Mufid)<sup>624</sup> as well as being the recipient of inspiration, if not revelation. He is said to have sat in Makkah and wrote “inspired verses” that were put on par with the Qurʾān itself.<sup>625</sup> al-Ḥallāj’s claims of Divinity seem to differ little from those ascribed to some of the early Kaysāniyyah and other subsets of the Ḥanafid *ghulāḥ*. Massignon argues that al-Ḥallāj’s claim to theopathic union was perceived as undercutting and destroying the institution of the *sharīʿah*, which itself was the ground of caliphal authority.<sup>626</sup> Most particularly, he was condemned for stating that the prayer of a sincere believer in his house was sufficient for fulfilling the obligation of *ḥajj* (even though al-Ḥallāj himself performed the *ḥajj* three times).<sup>627</sup> al-Ḥallāj’s ideas may seem shocking and revolutionary, and yet we have already had occasion to witness the way that many of these beliefs were attributed to the early *ghulāḥ*. We see, for example, that many of the *ghulāḥ* were condemned for claiming “prophecy”, and how the followers of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb believed that every believer was the recipient of his own, personal revelation. Based upon this “dispensation”, many of them were said to believe that the *sharīʿah* was no longer incumbent upon them, and that because they “knew their Imām” they no longer needed to be burdened by rites and rituals. All of this seems identical to the statements which led to al-Ḥallāj’s death. Indeed, this belief in *ibāḥah* (the rejection of the *sharīʿah*) seems to go hand in hand with the incarnationist ideas that are associated with the *ghulāḥ* sects. In addition to claiming Divinity for the Imāms, they were also seen to claim Divinity for themselves, and so they are absolved from the normal routines of worship.<sup>628</sup> The presence of this idea calls into question the commonly held thesis that the deification of the Imāms was based on excessive devotion to the Imāms themselves or upon messianic militancy. Certainly al-Ḥallāj’s beliefs were not based upon

<sup>622</sup> Amir-Moezzi “Aspects de l’imāmologie I” 201-202.

<sup>623</sup> Cf. Fakhry 246.

<sup>624</sup> Massignon 150.

<sup>625</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid.

<sup>627</sup> Mason 73.

<sup>628</sup> Modarressi *Crisis* 35, footnote 101.



such messianic notions, but were based upon a mystical idea of Divine union. Amongst the *ghulāh*, the same beliefs seem to be advocated, albeit in a different language. While al-Ḥallāj uses the language of the Ṣūfī's, the language of the *ghulāh* focuses much more on the Divine apotheosis of the Imāms themselves. As Corbin and Moezzi both argue, that "knowing one's Imāms" is direct knowledge of God plays a pivotal role in early Imāmī Shī'ī mysticism.<sup>629</sup> Early *ghulāh* speculations do not seem to merely revolve around the belief that the Imāms are God, but that the true believer himself becomes either an epiphany or incarnation of God once he recognizes the Imām in this way.<sup>630</sup>

al-Ḥallāj's death, then, can be seen as the final and most violent attempt to destroy the ideas that had once been propounded by people like Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, while simultaneously preserving the superhuman characteristics of the Imām that were presented by the early *ghulāh*. The crisis between al-Ḥallāj and An-Nawbakhtī could not but come to a head. Arjomand and Momen both argue that the Nawbakhtī clan, who had a powerful position of authority with the 'Abbāsīd caliphs, conspired to have al-Ḥallāj executed.<sup>631</sup> He was publicly crucified, which is (ironically enough) the same way that Abū al-Khaṭṭāb was killed.<sup>632</sup> After this, it would seem that the *ghulāh* tendency within Shī'ism was nearly crushed. The last real explosion of rebellion in this regard, however, would be the incident of Shalmagānī. Shalmagānī was a highly respected member of the Shī'ah orthodoxy and a representative of the same "representative" (*ṣafīr*) of the Twelfth Imām, Ibn Rūḥ An-Nawbakhtī.<sup>633</sup> In this capacity, he compiled a number of legal manuals, purportedly on behalf of the Twelfth Imām.<sup>634</sup> And yet, for apparently no explicable reason, he seems to have suddenly become one of the *ghulāh*. As stated above, the degree of abuse which is heaped upon him by the Imāmī community makes it difficult to make out what he actually said. Furthermore, he did not have an independent following in the way that al-Ḥallāj did, nor did he become a subject of popular devotion in the same fashion. As such, there is a greater lack of sources that would help pin down what his rebellion against Shī'ah orthodoxy actually consisted of. He purportedly claimed to be the Imām's sole representative, and then claimed to be the Imām himself. Alongside of this, he is said to have stated that the Hidden Imām was, in fact,

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<sup>629</sup> Corbin *Cyclical* 119.

<sup>630</sup> Ibid. 126-127.

<sup>631</sup> Arjomand "Crisis" 506.

<sup>632</sup> Daftary *Ismā'īlīs* 89.

<sup>633</sup> Sachedina *Islamic Messianism* 95.

<sup>634</sup> Arjomand "Crisis" 507; Hussain 126.

Satan.<sup>635</sup> The conjunction of both beliefs seems highly improbable, and is most likely a product of the anathema and abuse which was leveled against him by the guardians of Shī‘ah orthodoxy. What seems most likely is that he had become an incarnationist in the way of al-Ḥallāj, though some have accused him of becoming an Ismā‘īlī.<sup>636</sup> It is said that he believed that God had been incarnated in human form throughout human history, first in Adam and then down through all the prophets and Imāms.<sup>637</sup> This idea seems identical to the belief system espoused by the early *ghulāh*, as well as later groups like the Ahl-i Ḥaqq, the Bekhtashis, and the Nuṣayris. It is also reported that, true to the teachings of the “extremist sects”, he implied that he himself was the incarnation of God as well.<sup>638</sup>

It is interesting to note that Ibn Athīr accused Shalmagānī of being a Nuṣayri. Though Ibn Athīr is hardly an unbiased source, the beliefs that he lists are remarkably similar to many ideas expressed in the theology of al-Khaṣībī and other Nuṣayris, as well as al-Ḥallāj, and even many later Sufis. Some of the most relevant beliefs are

1) That Shalmagānī is the Eternal God; we have already seen how many of the *ghulāh* were simultaneously accused of holding up the Divinity of one (or all) of the Imāms, *as well* as themselves. However, this belief should be understood in the light of the second belief attributed to Shalmagānī by Ibn Athīr:

2) That Allāh is Incarnate in every thing, in accordance with the capacity that being has to incarnate him: God is manifest in everything, and every thing, and is present in everything, manifest to it in the form of that being’s conception of God. As ‘Uthmān notes, there seems to be little substantive difference between this position and that of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, as explicated by Ibn ‘Arabi and others,<sup>639</sup> or the “incarnationism” of al-Ḥallāj.

3) That the Divinity has manifested itself in a succession of human forms, culminating in the historical personage of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.

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<sup>635</sup> Ibid.

<sup>636</sup> Hussain 127.

<sup>637</sup> Arjomand Ibid.

<sup>638</sup> Ibid. 128.

<sup>639</sup> ‘Uthmān *al-‘Alawīyyūn* 79-80.

4) That the name “Allāh” is only a name pointing to a meaning; as has been discussed, the true meaning is seen by the Nuṣayris to be ‘Alī.

5) Antinomianism, sexual communism, and other “deviations” from the *sharī‘ah*.<sup>640</sup>

As has been seen, all of these ideas are eminently *ghulāh* beliefs, and bear striking similarities to those of the Nuṣayrīs. Hashim ‘Uthmān, in his history of the Nuṣayris, rejects the idea that Shalmagānī was a Nuṣayrī out of hand. He states that the term Nuṣayrī did not appear until well after Shalmagānī’s death, and argues instead that Shalmagānī was an Ismā‘īlī.<sup>641</sup> He also cites a poem of al-Khaṣībī where he is seen to curse both al-Ḥallāj and Shalmagānī.<sup>642</sup> The ideas that Ibn Athir lists presents a compelling case that, if not actually being a proto-Nuṣayrī himself, Shalmagānī was at least inspired by the same sources that influenced Ibn Nuṣayr and al-Khaṣībī. In any case, it should be born in mind that ‘Uthmān’s study is primarily apologetic and seeks to place the Nuṣayris within the confines of Muslim orthodoxy.

It seems probable that, at the very least, Shalmagānī’s beliefs were somewhat similar to the ones attributed to him by Ibn [REDACTED] especially the idea of the Divine Reality’s manifestation in human form. Of all the contradicting statements about his beliefs, this belief remains the one constant. In the midst of the battle that seemed to be raging between the *ghulāh* and the orthodox *fuqahā’*, Shalmagānī’s turn towards an incarnationist or quasi-incarnationist belief can only be described as a defection.<sup>643</sup> For this reason he was the subject of the most intense abuse: more so than al-Ḥallāj the Ṣufī Shalmagānī was perceived as a traitor. Furthermore, his defection had terrible consequences, for the Imāmī community had come to rely upon his jurisprudential treatises (and, according to Arjomand, continued to do so for a number of generations after his “apostasy”, because they simply had no other alternative).<sup>644</sup> He was condemned by An-Nawbakhtī and excommunicated (purportedly on the authority of a letter from the Twelfth Imām)<sup>645</sup> It was inevitable that much harsher abuse would be reserved for him, for he did more damage to the fragile structure of Shī‘ah

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<sup>640</sup> Ibid. 46.

<sup>641</sup> Ibid. 64-65

<sup>642</sup> Ibid. 65.

<sup>643</sup> Newman *Formative* 24.

<sup>644</sup> Arjomand “Crisis” 508.

<sup>645</sup> Hussain 128-130.

authority that the Nawbakhtī family was trying to maintain. Once again, the Nawbakhtī family's purported dedication to the cause of the Twelfth Imām did not prevent him from going to the 'Abbāsīd authorities, and with their help Shalmagānī was driven into exile, and eventually executed just like al-Ḥallāj.<sup>646</sup> It is interesting to note that Ibn Rūḥ died three years later, and his replacement ('Alī ibn Muḥammad As-Samarī) issued no other decree from the Twelfth Imām except an edict which ordered the destruction of the entire system of representatives, and the beginning of the Imām's complete Occultation.<sup>647</sup> As such, in spite of Ibn Rūḥ and his family's attempt to create a system of authority (with himself and his family at the lead), the *ṣaḥīr* (representative) system had proven too fragile to maintain, and finally self-destructed.<sup>648</sup>

These events, the execution of al-Ḥallāj and Shalmagānī, seem to have marked a decisive turning point in ousting "extremist" speculations from the Shī'ah community. The belief that the Imām of the time, the *quṭb*, or the "Perfect Man" was the supreme epiphany of God continued to be espoused; but they were no longer being espoused by chiliastic militants in Kūfah, but rather by people who identified themselves Sufis and, more often than not, as Sunnīs. Indeed, it has been argued by Hodgson that the Sufis as were the true inheritors to the *ghulāh* of the early Imāmī Shī'ī period,<sup>649</sup> and the martyrdom of al-Ḥallāj would seem to give great credence to this argument.

### General Conclusions of the Research

The basic strands of early Imāmī Shī'ī Imāmology bear a great number of overlaps with the Imāmology of the *ghulāh*. The belief in *tafwīḍ*, which posits the Imāms as demiurges ruling over the Creation, can be found throughout early works like *al-Kāfī* and *Baṣā'ir ad-Darajāt*. Both these authors seem to have explicitly accepted the idea that the Imāms are not only infallible but are also, somehow, more than human, and fulfil a role on the earth that is greater than mere preserver and explicator of the Law. This view of Imāmology is implicitly linked up with a negative theology that was advocated by both al-Kulaynī and aṣ-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, traces of which can be found by Mu'tazilah influenced works like *Nahj al-Balāḡah*. God is posited as being ultimately unknowable in His Essence. The only mechanism to know Him is through knowledge of the Imām, a knowledge that

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<sup>646</sup> Arjomand Ibid.

<sup>647</sup> Ibid. 508; Hussain 133-134; Momen 164.

<sup>648</sup> Momen 164-165.

<sup>649</sup> Hodgson 8.

is often cast in very mystical terms involving vision and light. This doctrine was built upon early *ghulāh* speculation, speculation that had very little to do with the theological concerns of early Imāmī scholars. But once this group of (for the most part) Ḥanafid extremists began to intermingle with the Ḥusaynid moderates, their doctrines begin to seep into Twelver Shi'ism. Much is rejected: antinomianism, incarnationism, and anything that would contradict the belief in the finality of Muḥammad's revelation. But much is retained as well: the idea that the Imām is the embodiment of Divine attributes, that he manifests all that is manifestable of God, and provides a link between creation and Creator. This doctrine was not a part of Ḥusaynid legitimism before Muḥammad al-Bāqir, but becomes a useful tool in elaborating the particular Shī'ite version of the *via negativa*.

The authors of the early corpus of Shī'ī *ḥadīth* books do not appear to have considered themselves merely jurists, or even merely scholars of *ḥadīth*. They seem to set themselves the task of correcting the *muqāṣṣirah* tendency and presenting the "true" teachings of the Imāms concerning their status, a teaching that has a certain mystical quality to it. Salvation is to be achieved not merely through adherence to the law, and truth is not to be found only through reason and dialectical proof; rather, an added component that is decidedly "arational" and "visionary" is given heavy emphasis. Infallibility of the Imāms is important, but it is only part of an overall view on Imāmology. The Imām is not merely the teacher of the Law, but is a manifestation of the Divine reality. The statement "We are the most beautiful names of Allāh", ascribed to Imām al-Bāqir and Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq in many *ḥadīths*, is perhaps the best summation of this view. For al-Kulaynī, aṣ-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, and many other scholars, there was something extremely important to be found in the *being* of the Imām, over and above the mere *teachings* of the Imām.

This teaching was, in many ways, "mystical" insofar as it continually posits a source of knowledge that is beyond the mere faculty of reason. Yet the arguments for that source are presented in highly rational terms. Esotericism and antinomianism are explicitly rejected, as are their supporters amongst the early *ghulāh*. Nonetheless, the precedence of person over institution remains in another form: the suspension of so much of the Law with the onset of the Occultation, the questionable status of the 'Uthmānic text (a text that is to be recited in the daily prayers), the idea that the Shī'āh were given a special legal exemption from the *khums* solely because of their love for the Imāms, may very well have reflected a certain tension between a religion based on person (the *ghulāh*) and a religion based on law (that of pre-Bāqir Ḥusaynid Shi'ism).

Finally, there is absolutely no connection between the politically active and revolutionary tendency of the *ghulāh* and authors like al-Kulaynī. The doctrine of “waiting” for the Mahdī (even if the number of the Mahdī in the series of Imāms had yet been fully agreed upon) seems to have taken shape, and these authors were clearly looking forward to the future. No political program can be detected in their works, and this shows that political extremism and “Imāmological extremism” were not necessarily linked.

Many of the more “extreme” beliefs about *tafwīd* would fade in importance amongst Imāmī scholars as the Buyid period would progress. The basic belief of infallibility (which certainly many Sunnīs would consider “extreme”) was preserved, as well as some (if not all) of the miraculous powers of the Imām.

Things seem to have come to a great head during the period of the Short Occultation, and a violent suppression was meted out against the “extremist” groups. Imāmī Shī‘ism would be consolidated into Twelver Shī‘ism during this period, with a much greater emphasis given to the place of reason than was given by earlier scholars. The *ghulāh* would continue in the form of a number of disparate sects that have always remained numerically small and ostracized by the larger Muslim community. Clearly, however, the cut-and-dried distinction between “extreme” and “moderate” was not so clear at the time of scholars like al-Kulaynī and aṣ-Saffār al-Qummī as once alien *ghulāh* ideas were integrated into the Shī‘ite mainstream. The evidence suggests that ideas that would gradually become more and more unpalatable to many (though certainly not all) Twelver Imāmī scholars, were openly accepted and advocated throughout the early Imāmī *ḥadīth* literature.

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